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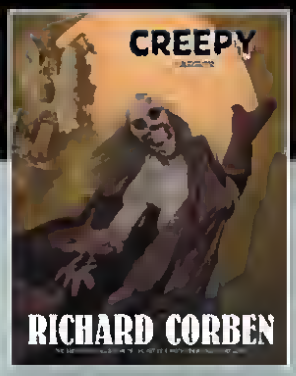
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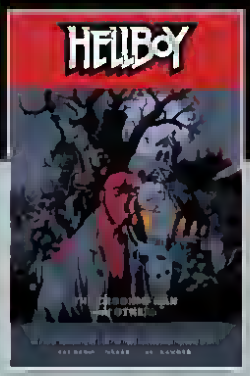
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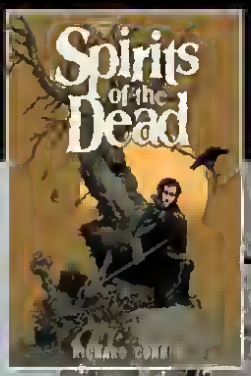
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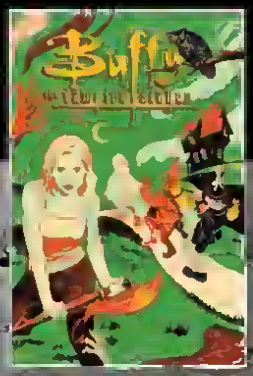
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RICHARD CORBEN









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RUE MORGUE
November 2014
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One of the most frightening films to come out of Australia, *The Babadook* brings us a boogeyman story from a rare female perspective. PLUS: The designer of Mr. Babadook himself takes us through the terrifying storybook at the centre of the film.
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NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND

There's a rite of passage that I suspect is being lost to the Information Age: getting the bejesus scared out of you by a book. As a tot, I had plenty of kid-friendly monster titles that I loved (anyone else have the *Dracula's Castle* pop-up book?), but they were always age-appropriate – I don't mean those books. I'm referring to that time in every kid's life when he or she is exposed to an illustration or a photo that immediately instills fear in a way that nothing else had before that moment.

I've been pondering it because of our cover story on *The Babadook*, and the terrifying, mysterious would-be kids' book, *Mr. Babadook*, which unleashes the monster in the film. Magical/forbidden/evil tomes are commonplace in horror narratives, but something as innocuous as a pop-up book terrorizing a little kid is something new. The closest experience to it in real life (mine, at least) is discovering a boogeymen in a book that takes hold of your young mind. As you can read in our Expiring Minds column on the letters page (opposite), movies, TV shows, strangers, etc. easily scare the hell out of us when we're young, but the experience isn't the same as coming across something on a page. The moving image is usually fleeting and out of our control, such as when I glimpsed a vampire face pressed up against a window while flipping channels and landing on the Dan Curtis TV movie *The Norliss Tapes* when I was about six or seven. A book, however, can be closed and put away, yet it sits there on the shelf, waiting to be opened again... if you dare.

For me, that book was a 1979 release called *Giants*, put together by one David Larkin. When I was four or five, my family went to a book sale; I was allowed to choose two titles, so I picked this one and art book featuring Dali. Both of them were hugely influential in showing me things I couldn't previously imagine, but it was *Giants* that gave me my first boogeyman, and sparked that simultaneous repulsion and attraction that draws us all to the horror genre. The image that got me was a painting called "A Frost Giant," by either Julek Heller, Carolyn Scrace or Juan Wijngaard – the book doesn't specify which of the illustrators did which pieces of art.



As you can see, it depicts a towering monster covered in snow, with huge claws and a mouth full of pointy teeth – plus his eyes set so far back in his face that the sockets are ice caves. He certainly wasn't the kind of boogeyman that could fit under my bed. Rather, I would look at him, terrified that he could rise out of the snowy Alberta winter landscape and swallow me up. At the same time I loved the thrill of marvelling at his sheer size, power and monstrosity. I would stare at the picture, then get scared and close the book until I was ready for another dose. It was the stirrings of a lifelong addiction to monsters, I didn't let my parents how the book affected me, either, for fear of having it taken away.

And it wasn't the image alone that got me. The book is written as if giants are real and they have mostly gone extinct. *Mostly*... With sentences such as, "Reports continue to appear from time to time of tracks of staggering size discovered in remote areas," I'm sure *Giants* also started my fascination with supposed real life cryptozoo creatures and, in general, stories that blur the line between reality and fiction, such as *The Legend of Boggy Creek* and *The Blair Witch Project*. (I'd say there's even a direct line from the Frost Giant to my current fascination with scientists using ancient DNA to try to bring the woolly mammoth back from extinction.) Many of us, especially genre fans, do whatever we can to preserve that childhood notion that the world has real monsters. Because to deny it entirely is to grow up completely, and who wants that?

A children's author named Mac Barnett recently summed things up nicely during a TED Talk, when he said, "I want fiction to escape and come into the real world. I want a book to be a secret door that opens and lets the stories out into reality."

Giants was *my* secret door, and I hope that sort of thing isn't lost on younger generations that are increasingly less insulated from the real world. While *The Babadook* takes the idea of the secret door to a terrifying, literal extreme, it also fully understands the power of a book on a child, and entices with the promise of magic.

So give kids books full of monsters and fantasy and things that will open their eyes and perhaps even scare 'em a bit. If they're sheltered completely, they may miss out on that amazing but fleeting time when fantasy spills into reality and Frost Giants might just walk the Earth.

Dave Alex

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RUE MORGUE #150 would not have been possible without the valuable assistance of Mary-Beth Hollyer, Al McMullen and Jacob Goodnight.

***Rue Morgue* #150** is dedicated to Rogelio Gudiño Astudillo (1932-2014) R.I.P.

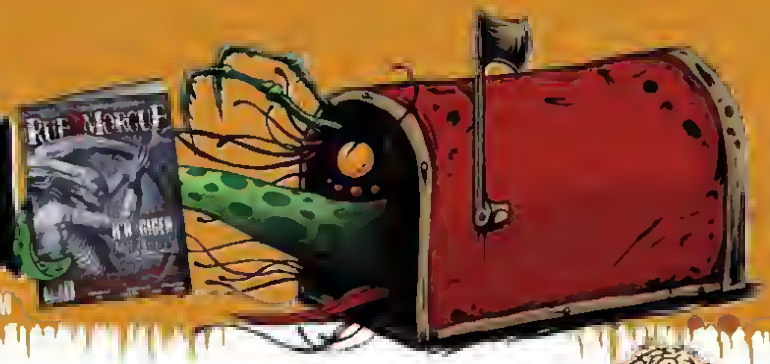
COVER: THE BABADOOK
Illustration by Gary Pullin, design by Andrew Wright

Rue Morgue Magazine is published monthly (with the exception of February) accepts no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, photos, art or other materials. Freelance submissions accompanied by S.A.S.E. will be seriously considered and, if necessary, returned.

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, through the Canada Periodical Fund (CPF) for our publishing activities.
RUE MORGUE Magazine #150 ISSN 1481 – 1103
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POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



IN APRIL OF THIS YEAR, my mom passed away after a five-month fight with brain cancer. As I prepared her eulogy, I kept coming back to what she loved the most. It was, simply, all things horror. It was a love that both she and I shared. My earliest memories are of watching *The Last House on the Left*, *The Exorcist* and *Halloween* with her. I remember her taking me to a double-feature at the drive-in of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Nightmare*. She was scared that they wouldn't let us in, since I was only thirteen years old. Her solution was to take ash from the cigarette lighter and give me a mustache so I would look older.

As I got into high school, she began helping me with Halloween costumes. Mom always felt that grosser was better. She made me a bloody mask out of cotton balls and latex, sewed real cow brains to the skull cap, gave me a hunchback, and constructed a walking cane on which she mounted a real lamb's head. Even as Mom got into her '60s she continued to watch anything with zombies, vampires or werewolves. It certainly didn't matter whether they were A- or Z-grade. She loved *Twilight* just as much as she loved *The Walking Dead*.

She also loved your magazine. As I grew up, got married and had kids, it kept us talking about horror. She always asked when the new issue of *Rue Morgue* was coming out and would get excited about new movies and books on the horizon. Your magazine brought her a great deal of joy.

As she got sicker and became less and less coherent, it was the thought of her no longer able to read *Rue Morgue* and not being able to finish the last season of *The Walking Dead* that really drove her illness home to me. Watching her disappear a little more each day became the real horror in my life.

She's been gone nearly six months. I just got the new issue of *Rue Morgue* and *The Walking Dead* starts in two weeks. I miss her, but the memories that we shared, which include the sharing of your wonderful magazine, make me smile and help me move forward.

I just wanted to say thank you.

WILLIAM KING – YORBA LINOA, CALIFORNIA

[*Thank you for the wonderful letter, William. -Ed.*]

RECENTLY READ *RM#148*. Great issue! The article on China's Yu Lan Festival was fantastic. Keep it up!

@JOEPROG, VIA TWITTER

I'VE BEEN ATTENDING FanExpo every year since 2006, specifically for *Rue Morgue*'s Festival of Fear. I wanted to express my thanks and give kudos for the organization, the planning, and the improvements I saw this year. I loved that the FoF was truly a horror-centric convention, within the larger con. That's what FoF used to be, and this year it was perhaps the best laid out that I've seen. I hope to see things continue in this direction! It is great to see that the new management and planning have revitalized the experience as a whole.

MARK POLLESEL – OTTAWA, ONTARIO

JUST WANTED TO SAY that Dave Alexander's Note From Underground in *RM#147* is exceptionally good and very thought-provoking.

PAUL CRIOER, VIA FACEBOOK

RE: RM#147 Excellent 20 year spread on *The Crow*, including the Note From Underground. I feel the same and couldn't have said it better myself. For this, I thank you.

GERI PRINCE VIA FACEBOOK

THE BEST PODCAST on earth is no more? Say it ain't so! The reason I buy *Rue Morgue* magazine today is because I loved the podcast so much. Feedback and Last Chance Lance, you will be sorely missed.

DARIAN O'QUINN, VIA FACEBOOK

HAS THERE BEEN any official statement on why the Rue Morgue Podcast ended? It was probably my favorite podcast (in spite of Last Chance Nancy and his endless failed attempts at humor). Thankfully, I still have about 50 old episodes to burn through, but what do I do after that?!?

OAN RICCHEZZA, VIA FACEBOOK

[*We are extremely proud that the Rue Morgue Podcast had such a long and successful run, and thankful for its many fans. Unfortunately we could not sustain a produced show that was made available week after week at no cost to listeners and felt it had run its course. We will miss it dearly along with the weekly antics of Feedback and Last Chance Lance. -Ed.*]

EXPIRING MINDS...

ON RUE MORGUE'S FACEBOOK PAGE



Who was your childhood boogeyman?

A witch in my closet, and a man inside my wall. I put my bed in the middle of the room for awhile, so I'd not be near a wall.

SARAH JOYCE

I used to have a recurring nightmare where the Ghostbusters and I are in an abandoned underground train station and Michael Jackson, in "Thriller," would attack us, killing all four Ghostbusters and making me watch. So Michael Jackson was/is my boogeyman. Horrible.

DANIEL GAMMAGE

When I was about four or five I had a terrifyingly real dream that the McDonald's Hamburgler was under my kitchen sink. And when I opened the door he gutted me with a huge butcher knife.

MIKE KWIATKOWSKI

McGruff the Crime Dog. I used to scream and hide behind my grandma's chair whenever he came on the telly. Just got over a massive phobia of mascots this past year, at age 44. I had two sweet neighbours that were Furries and they helped me get over it.

ANNIE HIGHTOWER

Barlow from *Salem's Lot* when I was seven! When he popped up on the screen I started puking which caused my twin brother to start puking.

KEVIN LEE BOLICK

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Dreadlines

NEWS HIGHLIGHTS HORROR HAPPENINGS

BROADCAST THOUGHT TEACHES BY PSYCHOANALYZING MOVIE BOOGEYMEN

Horror cinema is increasingly stepping out from the shadows for appreciation as an appropriate art form for cultural analysis, and the three members of Broadcast Thought are among a number of academics who have recently risen to meet that need. Comprised of three physicians specializing in psychiatry, the team offers consultancy on creating credible characters with mental health issues for film and TV. They also do regular media appearances, such as a panel at this year's San Diego Comic Con (SDCC) titled "Freddy vs Jason vs. Michael! Inside the Minds of Freddy Krueger, Jason Voorhees, & Michael Myers."

H. Eric Bender, Praveen R. Kambam and Vasilis K. Pozios are all practicing physicians who were initially brought together at an academic conference where a lunch break between presenting their research revealed their shared love of comics, films and all things geeky.

"We hopefully aid audiences in processing what they see and prevent the automatic linking of violence they see on screen – and in real life – with mental illness," explains Dr. Kambam. They do this, he says, by analyzing characters – in the case of SDCC, Freddy Krueger, Michael Myers and Jason Voorhees – to diagnose their illnesses and suggest possible treatment plans, just as they would if the character existed in real life.

"Our approach to discussing fictional characters mirrors our approach to evaluating actual patients," he adds. "The goal is to generate a list of potential diagnoses, whittle down that list and hopefully result in both an accurate diagnosis and effective treatment. In the case of Pamela Voorhees, this led to a conversation as to whether certain behaviors were intended to be symptoms of psychosis or dissociative symptoms. Discussing the evidence provides readers with some insight into what symptoms are associated with particular illnesses, and how we arrive at specific diagnoses. If we see Pamela Voorhees as someone experiencing symptoms of psychosis – i.e., auditory hallucinations and delusions – then treating those symptoms with anti-psychotic medication would be recommended."



Broadcast Thought: *Praveen R. Kambam, M.D., Vasilis K. Pozios, M.D., H. Eric Bender, M.D.*

Dr. Kambam adds that characters such as Krueger and Myers display elements of psychopathy that are difficult to treat, as traditional methods such as group therapy can actually worsen the condition.

Each member of Broadcast Thought has a forensic background and their special interests include forensic psychiatry, attachment history and psychological defenses. They begin panels by listing characters' potential conditions based on what they consider the appropriate evidence. From there, they examine how differently the characters' symptoms can be interpreted to provide the most likely medical diagnoses.

"Even characters who are meant to be symbols of evil can be – erroneously – depicted as having direct connections to clinical mental illness," notes Dr. Kambam. "Michael Myers is a perfect example of this. He is meant to be evil incarnate, yet he escapes from a psychiatric hospital. So, a link is made between pure evil and clinical mental illness."

The group acknowledges that discussing supposedly evil or supernatural characters in the context of mental illness can reinforce the link between illness and violence. Despite this, Dr. Kambam says their aim is to correct the "misattribution" that is already there.

While showing that the supernatural can be a way of discussing the unknown, representing it can simply mean showing everyday difference. If their SDCC panel is anything to go by, Broadcast Thought brings more understanding to even the most infamous horror monsters and the psychiatric conditions they may represent.

According to Dr. Kambam; "We start from the premise that raising awareness of mental health issues is effectively done when you put that conversation in the context of something that people already find interesting and enjoy – in this case, horror films."

DR. KAREN OUGHTON



NEW HORROR CHANNEL TO LAUNCH IN CANADA

If all goes as planned, Canadian horror fans will soon be able to get their fix around the clock with a 24-hour cable television channel devoted exclusively to genre programming. Montreal-based Callisto Television Corp. is planning a late-2014 launch for Terror TV, a high-definition channel that will broadcast both contemporary and classic horror films along with TV series, short films and original programming.

Terror TV is being spearheaded by Callisto General Manager Sylvain Gagné, who hopes the channel will fill a void left by the demise of Scream, a Canadian horror channel that was launched in 2001. After eight years on the air, Scream was re-branded as a more mainstream channel called Dusk, before finally signing off in 2012 to make room for the family-oriented ABC Spark.

"I've been part of the film and TV industry for more than twenty years now," says Gagné. "Since I'm a big fan of horror, I was watching channels like Scream, which sadly became Dusk. At that time, I was working with Lionsgate in Quebec, and we had quite a success with our genre films. ... After [doing some] research, I decided to submit a licence request to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission to launch a new horror channel in Canada – something more [along the lines of] FEARnet in the US and The Horror Channel in the UK."

A cursory browse through the Terror TV website reveals a diverse lineup, with titles ranging from 1930s classics such as *The Mummy* and *The Mark of the Vampire*, to more contemporary fare such as *A Horrible Way to Die* and *Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon*. There are plenty of horror standbys – *Poltergeist*, *Friday the 13th*, etc. – but slots will also be allocated for lesser-seen cult films, including 1986's *Dreamaniac* and 1978's *The Shout*. Terror TV will air all of its features without commercial interruption.





"Our programming will span [nearly] a century of horror content," Gagné acknowledges. "Terror TV will broadcast feature films from the '30s up to recent blockbusters. [There will be] a lot of room for classics in the genre – films from the '60s, '70s, and the slasher years of the '80s. We will also have theme nights: Hammer Nights, From the Vault, Creature Night, and Network Premiere."

Gagné says he wants to avoid the trap that often ensnares specialty channels: a dearth of programming that results in repeated airings of the same batch of movies.

"If you have respect for your audience, you don't broadcast the same movie over and over," he says.

To that end, Callisto has struck deals with Warner, MGM, Sony and Paramount; other deals are pending as of press time. Terror TV will also air a number of horror-themed TV series, including *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and *The Hitchhiker*. To fill the channel's around-the-clock schedule, Callisto is also developing original programming. The channel's first original series are *What's Up?*, which Gagné describes as "an *Entertainment Tonight* for horror fans," and *Spasm Capsule*, which will showcase Canadian horror shorts and their directors. Gagné hopes Terror TV will eventually be able to offer original miniseries and movies-of-the-week.

There's no firm launch date yet, but Gagné is optimistic that Terror TV will make its bow before 2014 draws to a close. He says the biggest obstacle has been simply convincing carriers that the channel will be a boon to their lineup.

"We started [negotiating with carriers] in September 2013, and we are still in negotiations as of September 2014," he notes. "As soon as we get three deals, our promotional campaign will start and Terror TV will offer a free preview period."

Callisto plans to follow the launch of Terror TV with a French-language equivalent called Frissons TV. Gagné says the company hopes its horror channels will soon be able to premiere new feature films, beef up their rosters of original programming, and offer VOD and multiscreen broadcasts.

You can learn more about Terror TV at terrortv.ca.

APRIL SNELLIN

RUE MORGUE FRANCE'S FABIEN DELAGE LAUNCHES ALPS-SET HORROR FILM

Prepare yourself for *Cold Ground*, the feature-length directorial debut of Rue Morgue France curator Fabien Delage. Set in the French Alps in 1976, the found footage survival horror film will follow two journalists and their team as they investigate cattle mutilations in the area. But the perils of winter are nothing compared to the savage creatures they discover lurking in the dark.

Viewers can expect a mixture of mountain movies, *The Descent* and *The Blair Witch Project*, shot in Super-8 footage to give the film an authentic '70s look.

"The movie's gonna be very dark and brutal," Delage promises. "I wanted to do a French version of a Bigfoot movie where there is not only a single creature but a pack of them. Being lost in the mountains is already scary. If you add giant carnivorous beasts, it gets scarier."

Delage plans to shoot the film this coming January in the remote areas of the Alps he scouted during production on *Dead Crossroads*, a French TV travelogue show he co-created, which explores haunted places across France. Despite this, he readily acknowledges that shooting in the Alps in the middle of winter will be a major challenge.



"January is the perfect month if you want to go for a hike in the mountains and die!" he jokes. "Weather conditions are very rough and the risk of avalanche is very high. It's also very important not to get lost and to look where we put our feet. But at least if we start a real avalanche, we'll save money on CGI!"

Delage points out that the international success of extreme French horror films in recent years, such as *High Tension*, *Martyrs*, and *Inside*, has done nothing to convince skittish French production companies to fund genre films. As such, he is appealing to horror fans worldwide to help fund *Cold Ground*. A campaign on Indiegogo (search: "Cold Ground") was launched October 1 with a modest goal of $12,000 USD. It runs through November 30.

"Indiegogo is a good way to bring international horror fans together," Delage acknowledges. "It's not about asking them for money. It's about building a project all together, being part of the same adventure, knowing that their support will make the difference. When the industry can't help, you turn to the people. It is a sign of protest in a way. Where regular production companies fail, horror fans succeed."

SEAN PLUMMER

ENTRAILS

Sam Hall, writer for the classic horror TV series *Dark Shadows*, died September 26 at age 93. Hall wrote over 300 of the show's episodes and co-wrote screenplays for the features *House of Dark Shadows* and *Night of Dark Shadows*. Hall died after a bout of pneumonia in Rhinebeck, N.Y.



After teasing fans for months, Swedish death metal band Bloodbath announced its official return and confirmed new lead singer as Paradise Lost frontman Nick Holmes. The band is set to release the album *Grand Morbid Funeral* on November 17. Previous release, 2008's *The Fathomless Mastery*, was followed by lead singer Mikael Åkerfeldt's departure in 2012.

The Chronicles of Narnia director Andrew Adamson is set to helm the film adaptation of Dark Horse comic *Breath of Bones*. Steve Niles, Matt Santoro and Dave Wachter wrote the three-issue story, which is set during World War II, when a British plane crashes into a Jewish village, attracting the attention of the Nazis. In order to protect the village, a rabbi and his grandson create a Golem. Mike Richardson and Keith Goldberg of Dark Horse are producing the adaptation.

Producers are now looking toward the '90s for horror films to remake. A new version of *I Know What You Did Last Summer* is in development, according to *Deadline*, which reported that Sony Pictures is taking on the project, with *Oculus* director Mike Flanagan set to adapt the original book by Lois Duncan. Producer Neal Moritz will return to the series as well.

Electronic horror-inspired producer FIGURE has announced his American Terrorvision tour, which will run through November. The show, which will be largely improvised each night, will blend imagery of classic shock theatre and obscure films with his music. FIGURE elaborated in a recent press release: "I now have the ability to map these custom visuals to my music on the fly, adding a brand new element to my live show. I'm a horror buff which is definitely an inspiration for the visual direction on this tour." Tickets are on sale now.

Cakeageddon, the world's first edible horror farm happened this Halloween in Letchworth, England. The creator of the event, known as "Miss Cakehead" took over a family farm and proceeded to combine incredible horror-inspired cakes with actors in a haunted attraction setting. The evening's festivities included a Red Riding Hood that chased guests while three slaughtered cake pigs dripped "blood" (strawberry sauce). Confections from Miss Cakehead's extreme cake shop, Eat Your Heart Out, can be found in both Letchworth and London.

CHARLOTTE STEAR

MONSTRO BIZARRO

Although generally dismissed as mere urban legends, there are numerous eyewitness reports that claim upright, bipedal goat-like creatures lurk on the edges of our cities. Dubbed "goatmen," these cryptids are described as either hairy humanoids with a goat-like head, or horned men with fur and hooves, often bent on frightening or even killing those who encounter them. With an abundance of shocking tales and reports, author and paranormal researcher J. Nathan Couch sets out to explore the phenomenon in his new self-published book, *Goatman. Flesh or Folklore?* In it, Couch recounts famous cases, including that of the Pope Lick Monster, the Beast of Billiwhack, the Lake Worth Monster, and the Maryland Goatman, along with a horde of other hooved horrors, as he attempts to separate fact from folklore.

LYLE BLACKBURN

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CORONER'S REPORT

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

CASE NO 150

The X-Files episode "Home" was the first TV episode to ever be given the TV-MA (mature audiences) rating in the US.

On August 12 of this year, a hospital in Melbourne, Australia mistakenly faxed death notices to the family doctors of 200 of its patients. In actuality, the patients had been discharged from the hospital the previous day.

Director Takashi Miike has revealed that the substance used in the introduction to *Ichi the Killer* – in which the film's title rises out of a puddle of seminal fluid – is in fact real semen.

In order to achieve the strange, dream-like photography in Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr*, a thin gauze was put in front of the lens as a filter.

It is 25 minutes into the film *Ravenous* before Guy Pearce's character, the main protagonist who is in virtually every scene, utters his first full sentence.

Prior to her death at age twelve, *Poltergeist* star Heather O'Rourke claimed to have watched the movie a dozen times but the sequel only once because she "didn't think it was too great."

Director Tod Browning admitted that, were it not for his death, Lon Chaney – rather than Bela Lugosi – would have been his choice for the starring role in 1931's *Dracula*.

Marcus Peter Volke, a 28-year-old chef in Brisbane, Australia is believed to have killed and eaten parts of his transgender girlfriend, before fatally slicing his own throat while fleeing police, this past October.

In 1956, nine year-old Stewart Cohen died of a ruptured artery at a double bill of *The Quatermass Xperiment* and *The Black Sleep*, only to be immortalized in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the only known case of someone literally dying of fright at a horror film.

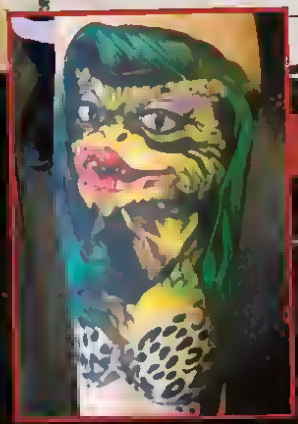
David Lynch has cited the O. J. Simpson trial as a major influence during the writing of *Lost Highway*, which deals with a man who killed his wife. Lynch cast Robert Blake to play the Mystery Man in the film, years later, in 2001, Blake would be put on trial for killing his own wife.

A Nightmare on Elm Street director Wes Craven created Freddy Krueger's appearance from an incident of his youth, when he saw a hobo staring at him through his window one day when he was ten years old.

In the 1950s, *Night of the Werewolf* director Paul Naschy penned several Western dime novels, published under the pseudonym Jack Mills.

The *Huffington Post* reported that a Chinese man almost died recently when he was infested with tapeworms after they got into his bloodstream and spread throughout his entire body, due to eating contaminated sashimi.

COMPILED BY MONICA S. #UEBLER AND DAVE ALEXANDER
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BODY HORROR

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ARTIST: Tony Sklepic (sanitariumstudios.com)

"I'm a child of the '80s, so I always jump at the chance to do pop culture-inspired pieces. *Gremlins* was definitely one of my childhood faves, so naturally I was super-excited when I was asked to do this piece. The client just really loved the character and it definitely suits her style and personality, as she's a rockabilly chick."

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5. **30 DAYS OF NIGHT**
 SHARK-FACED BLOOD-FEEDERS
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 UNDEAD ARTHUR GRIMSDYKE



TORTURED TAGLINES

POPCORN (1991)

"BUY A BAG... GO HOME IN A BOX."

Necronomicomics

BY JAY P. FOSGITT



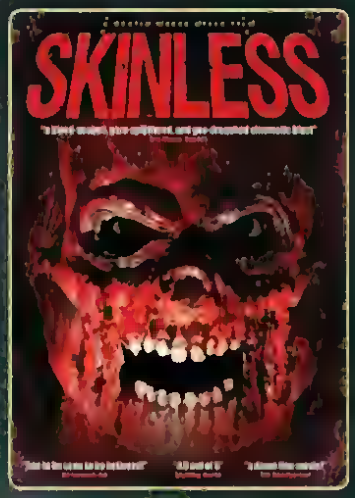
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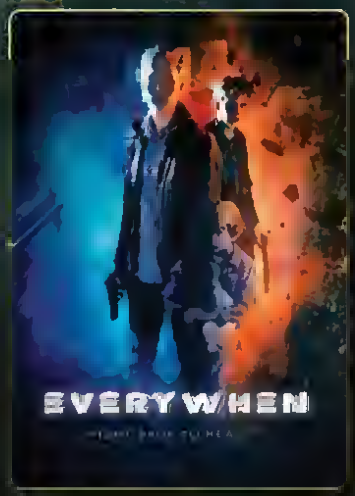
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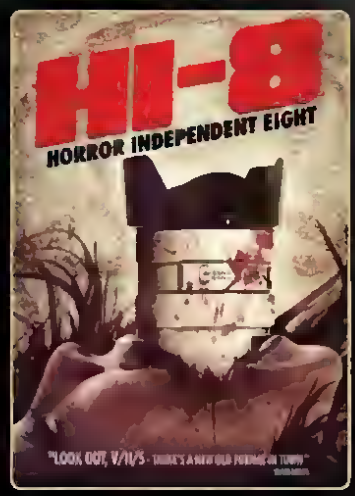
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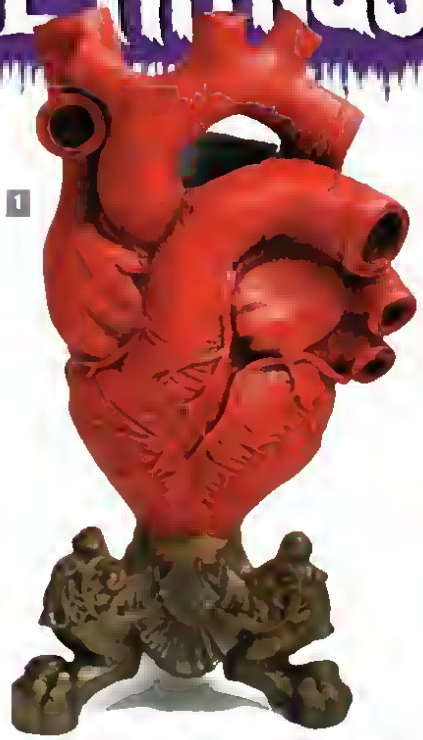


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CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES

DARK SHADOWS TRADING CARDS

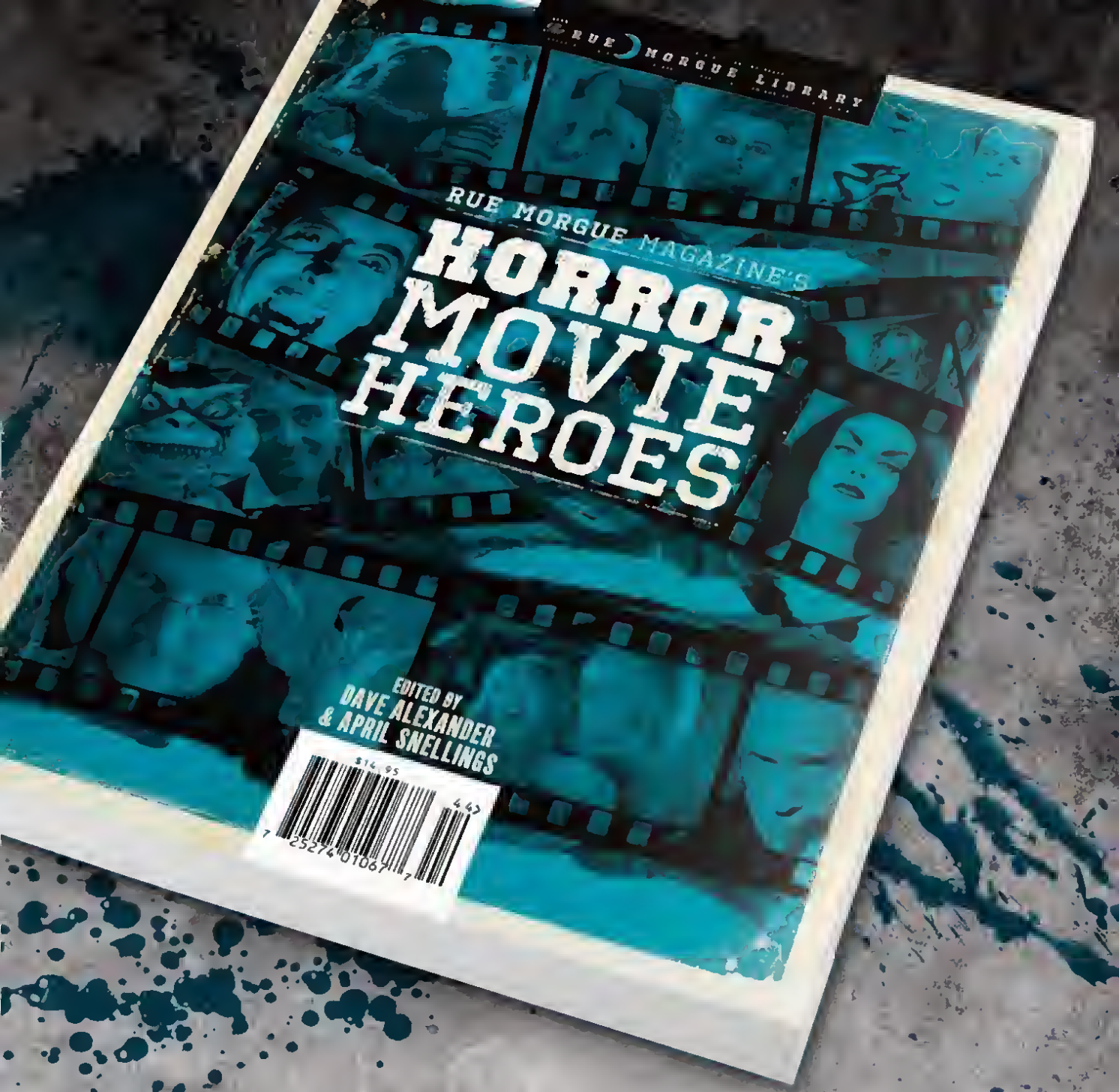
(Philadelphia Chewing Gum Co., 1968, 1969)

Dark Shadows spawned loads of merchandise, including two sets of trading cards (or "Wallet Photos," as they were called on the wrappers). Issued by the Philadelphia Chewing Gum company, each set contained 66 black and white cards, with the first batch (featuring a pink border) released in 1968, and the second (green border) in 1969. Many of the cards featured photos of vampire Barnabas Collins (Jonathan Frid) or ghost/werewolf Quentin Collins (David Selby). Originally sold for $0.05 a pack, now, on eBay, complete sets command between $120-$200 for pink bordered cards, and $90-$140 for green sets.

JAMES BURRELL

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ONE OF THE MOST FRIGHTENING FILMS TO COME OUT OF AUSTRALIA, *THE BABADOOK* BRINGS US A BOOGEYMAN STORY FROM A RARE FEMALE PERSPECTIVE...

A DARKNESS DOWN UNDER

BY APRIL SNELLINGS





EVER SINCE MEDEA KNIFED HER KIDDIES TO DEATH TO GET BACK AT HER UNFAITHFUL HUSBAND, STORYTELLERS HAVE KNELT AT THE BLOODY ALTAR OF THE MONSTROUS MOTHER.

What only a few filmmakers have done, though, is approach the story from the perspective of the mother in question, and to wonder what's driven her to such wicked measures.

Enter *The Babadook*, the remarkably effective feature debut from Australian writer-director Jennifer Kent. Out this month from IFC Midnight, it's a rare female-centric take on the mother-as-monster trope that turns a seemingly straightforward spookshow into a complex and disturbing psychological horror story. It's not really about the boogeyman that lurks under the bed, but the demons that lurk beneath our own skin.

In its early scenes, *The Babadook* seems to belong to an entirely different subgenre of domestic horror. Young Sam (played by newcomer Noah Wiseman) is a bit of a bad seed; he's prone to violent outbursts and most certainly does not play well with others. It's hard not to sympathize with his single mom, Amelia (Essie Davis), as she becomes increasingly frustrated with his behaviour and detached from the people who surround her. We eventually learn why she's so cold toward the boy: nearly seven years ago, Amelia's husband (Sam's father) was killed in a car accident when the young parents-to-be were on their way to the hospital to have their first child. Amelia can't help but see Sam



as a reminder of her dead husband – and, though she'd be reluctant to admit it, hold him responsible for his dad's death.

So the relationship between mother and son is already primed for a horrific breakdown when a strange storybook shows up on Sam's shelf (more on the book on pg. 21). When Amelia reads *Mister Babadook* to her son, the profoundly disturbing pop-up book heralds the arrival of its titular beastie – an entity inspired by fairy tale heavies and silent film monsters, that promises to insinuate itself into their lives. Amelia tries to destroy the book, but to no avail; it shows up again, with bonus material that writes her and Sam into the story, as murderess and victim. The Babadook soon invades their home, first manifesting itself as phantasmagoric visions and eerie sounds inspired by the silent films Sam often watches, and later inside the skin of Amelia herself as her behaviour becomes increasingly violent.

The Babadook, then, isn't simply a tale of a mother who turns on her child; it's a story about a woman whose grief is so all-encompassing that it takes on a horrifying life of its own, no matter how much she tries to suppress it. Adapted by Kent from her own 2005 short film *Monster*, it's equal parts haunted-house yarn, possession tale and subjective mindfuck. Eroding boundaries between dreams and reality conjure shades of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, but the movie's truest cinematic antecedents are the psychological horror films of Roman Polanski, particularly *The Tenant* and *Repulsion*. We begin to wonder if there's really a Babadook at all, or if Amelia has become so consumed by her grief and anger that she's become a mortal danger to her own child.

There's a lot to be said for Kent's mastery of old-school scare tactics and her commitment to in-camera effects, eerie sound design and creepy stop-motion animation, but it's Amelia's increasingly tenuous grip on reality that really makes the film so affecting. Kent's script, paired with exceptional performances by Davis and Wiseman, ratchets up the tension and threat of violence between Amelia and Sam until it hardly matters if there's a literal monster or not.

We spoke with the director via telephone from her Brisbane home, and asked her to help us peel back the layers of *The Babadook*.

HAVE YOU ALWAYS BEEN DRAWN TO THE HORROR GENRE?

I was a horror junkie from way back, from when I was a kid and I was watching movies I shouldn't have been watching at a very young age. I guess I started watching horror at around nine or ten years old, and really got hooked. I would watch things that were quite terrifying and not be able to get to sleep. It was kind of this compulsion. And I'm still like that; if I have a choice between a serious art-house film and a horror [film], I'll generally always go for the horror.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THOSE MOVIES THAT MADE A BIG IMPRESSION ON YOU AS A KID?

I remember seeing things on VHS like *The Amityville Horror* and *Friday the 13th*. You look at them now and they're quite cheesy, but at the time it was really something that terrified me, and got me interested in finding out more. *Halloween* and *The Thing*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* – all of those films really freaked me out. The monsters in them intrigued me and sent me back for more.

WHAT WAS THE GENESIS OF THE BABADOOK?

I'm a person who likes to face life square-on and, if difficulties come, I like to really try and experience them and process them. And what intrigued me was, what happens to a person if they suppress grief and difficulties and their shadow sides for so long? That was where the idea came from. And I didn't want it to be a kitchen-sink drama about someone coping with loss or depression. I wanted it to have a dream-like feel and a mythical feel, and that's how Mister Babadook was created. This woman pushes down on her grief so much that it splits off from her and develops a separate entity and that, for me, was really much more exciting than a straight drama approach.

THE BABADOOK HAS ITS ROOTS IN A SHORT FILM, MONSTER, WHICH YOU MADE IN 2005. WHEN DID YOU DECIDE TO TURN IT INTO A FEATURE?

People are assuming that it was really clever to make a short of a feature I wanted to make, but that's actually not true. I never had the intention when I was making *Monster* to make a feature out of that story, but the story stayed with me. I worked on a number of other feature scripts in the meantime, but the story of facing one's dark side really

stuck with me, and eventually a feature film demanded to be made out of it, basically. And I just kept working the idea, and that's how it popped up.

THE FEATURE IS STYLISTICALLY VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE SHORT. FOR INSTANCE, THERE ARE SOME REALLY STARTLING JUMP SCARES IN MONSTER, AND THERE ARE NONE IN THE BABADOOK. DID YOU MAKE A CONSCIOUS DECISION TO STEER AWAY FROM THAT STYLE OF HORROR?

Yeah, I did, and some people really don't like that. They want the roller-coaster ride, and then they want to go out and forget about it. I wanted to create a story that, metaphorically, starts by putting both hands around your neck and then just keeps tightening and tightening until you can't stand it anymore. And then the film explodes, as Amelia does, and things go where they go. We had a brilliant editor as well, so it was very much about creating that tension in the edits. Horror and suspense – in any film, really – is all about rhythm. It's closer to music, I find, than it is to literature. And the wonderful thing about horror is that you can get people involved in your idea on a very visceral, physical level. That's its power, I think. Horror is so underrated and so abused – it's like the country cousin that everyone wants to kick and put in the corner. And that's such a shame because, for me, scary films are amongst the most cinematic, because they're closest in structure to a dream. In dreams, we don't have security. We don't know what's coming next.

THE RELATIONSHIP AT THE CENTRE OF THE FILM – BETWEEN A MOTHER AND HER CHILD – IS FERTILE GROUND FOR HORROR FILMMAKERS. WHAT ATTRACTS YOU TO IT?

The story, to me, was king and the horror elements were a result of the story. So I never thought, "Ah, it'd be great to do a mother-and-child story because people seem to like that in horror." That was never my intenbon. I have a very loving mother, thankfully, and I thought, "How terrible would it be to not have that love?" That, for me, is a true horror. It's obviously a horror for the child who isn't loved, but it's equally a horror for the mother who can't give that love for whatever reason. And that was why, I guess, I chose a mother and son for this story, because the fallout of suppression is not just fallout on the individual. It bleeds into every relationship they have – especially the relationship with their children.

MOST OF THE HORROR FILMS THAT EXPLORE THAT RELATIONSHIP – PSYCHO, CARRIE, ROSEMARY'S BABY, THE BROOD – HAVE BEEN MADE BY MEN, AND YOU BROUGHT AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE TO IT. HOW IMPORTANT IS GENDER IN TELLING A STORY LIKE THIS?

I'm very proud to be making films with complex female characters. And I guess I've made an unwritten commitment to continuing to do that with whatever films I make. I think that it's not about making everything from a female perspective, but it's certainly about righting the tremendous imbalance that has been there since film was born. And I think it is becoming more balanced. It's funny because, as you would know, there's a huge female audience for horror. We obviously relate to it. We know fear intimately. We're drawn to watching films that scare us, and I think it's wonderful that women are finally getting the stories up on screen in every genre that they can relate to more. It's a really exciting time to be making films in that regard. And with Amelia, I've had lots of women contact me and connect with me and say how much they appreciated this character, but also a lot of men have really loved this character and responded to her, which is very heartening to me. When we right the balance in filmmaking, we right it for both sexes.

AMELIA IS A FASCINATING CHARACTER. AT TIMES, SHE'S MORE TERRIFYING THAN THE BABADOOK. IT'S A GREAT REMINDER THAT A CHARACTER DOESN'T HAVE TO BE LIKABLE ALL THE TIME TO BE SYMPATHETIC. THEY CAN DO AWFUL THINGS AND WE STILL FEEL FOR THEM, AS LONG AS WE CAN RELATE TO THEM.

That's right! In earlier drafts, I thought, "She's really annoying me. Why is she annoying me? Because she's so good!" And I thought, "She should lie – she should say her child is sick and then go shopping." These things really make me love her, because they're human. And I think that is, unfortunately, where a lot of sexism comes in in filmmaking is in the writing stage. As a writer, you get people going, "Oh, she's not likable. We need her to be more likable." And I totally disagree with this approach. I think we need to understand something about a character. They need to be empathetic, but we don't need to like them – we need to love them. And there is a difference. Some people don't like seeing a woman doing the things Amelia does in this film, and they hate the film for that reason. But I don't really care.

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE MONSTER. MISTER BABADOOK HAS SOME DEFINITE SHADES OF LON CHANEY, AND WAS OBVIOUSLY SHAPED BY SILENT HORROR MOVIES. HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT DESIGNING HIM?

I started with the idea of suppression. What does it feel like? Well, it doesn't feel comfortable. And then I thought, "What things make me feel uncomfort-



Female Trouble: *(Top to bottom) Amelia (Essie Davis) loses control, her avatar in the* ***Mister Babadook*** *book, and (opposite) Essie and Sam (Noah Wiseman) investigate a noise.*

IT WAS VERY IMPORTANT THAT IT FELT LIKE SOMETHING SINISTER PLAYING AT BEING HUMAN.
- JENNIFER KENT

THE DESIGNER OF *THE BABADOOK* TAKES US THROUGH THE TERRIFYING STORYBOOK AT THE CENTRE OF THE FILM

A NIGHTMARE IN PAPER



BY APRIL SNELLINGS

EARLY IN THE PROCESS OF BRINGING *THE BABADOOK* TO THE SCREEN, WRITER-DIRECTOR JENNIFER KENT REALIZED THAT HER HORRIFIC CREATION WOULDN'T BE CONFINED TO THE REALM OF MOVING IMAGES.

To get the effect she wanted – an unnerving blend of live-action film, stop-motion animation and pop-up storybooks – she would need to actually create the book that serves as a catalyst for the nightmare that unfolds onscreen. To that end, Kent and her creative team turned to American illustrator and stop-motion animator Alex Juhasz, whose work they discovered in the Emmy Award-winning opening credit sequence of Showtime's *United States of Tara*.

Juhasz says he was initially skeptical about tackling the project when the filmmakers contacted him. He's been doing stop-motion animation for years, but *The Babadook* represented a big departure for him.

"When you're doing stop-motion, it's a completely different kind of work than [live-action] film," he explains. "With animation, each frame is a movement. But this had to be completely usable in real-life. So as far as that goes, this was a different challenge for me."

Juhasz came on board while the film was in the early stages of preproduction, so his work on the storybook helped shape both the look of the film and its titular demon. Kent always intended for the book to be much more than a prop; in fact, Juhasz spent two and a half months in Australia working with the filmmaker and her team, literally sketching out the world of *The Babadook*.

"It wasn't just about getting the book right," Juhasz says, "it had to fit into the larger look of the film, it had to be part of that world. Since they were still developing it, I got to feel like I had a lot of freedom to sort of find it. We looked at a bunch of stuff, and I tried to absorb it and just feed something back to Jen that sort of touched a nerve emotionally – using not necessarily the aesthetic styles that we were looking at directly, but trying to capture the feeling of the references that she was giving."

Those references included silent horror films and very early sound films, particularly movies such as *Nosferatu*, *Vampyr* and *M*, which bore the distinct mark of the German Expressionist movement. Juhasz produced dozens of concept sketches to help Kent hone in on the elusive Mister Babadook – a shadowy, protean entity whose layers are slowly peeled away throughout the film.

"I did a ton of sketches, and she'd sort of point to one and be like, 'Let's head down that road,'" he explains. "That's my favourite way to work – the process of elimination. I just kept refining it until it looked right to me, and then I'd bring it back to Jen. She was great, because she left me a large chunk of creative freedom."

Those parameters included the monster's dual nature; the humanoid guise it takes at first, complete with top hat, wig and gloves; and the distinctly non-human monster that lurks beneath those mundane trappings.

"It has a fixed expression, and over time, it gets more horrible," Juhasz elaborates. "Jen and I talked a lot about the organic nature of whatever is behind the mask. It's not a person; it's almost like a collection of things, like sticks and hair, but also things like shadows and oil. And this is great food for making something. Those things all have their own tactile sense, but they also mean different things. That was really good direction, and a really cool vision from Jen. Finding something that's not quite in existence, that's almost attached itself to the corporeal world through affixing itself to this mask, like a poor imitation, or like an alien idea of what a man should be."

Tonally, Juhasz walked a fine line between two



very different aesthetics. He wanted to capture both the sense of wonder common to children's books, as well as the very old evil that lurks in the book's pages.

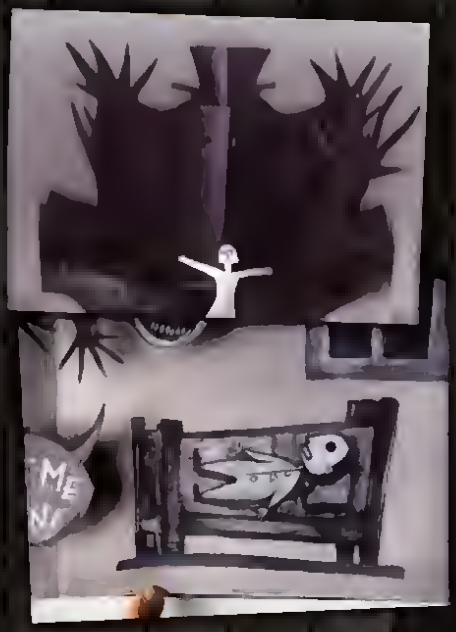
"I didn't want it to look too naïve," he says. "There should still be some sort of gravity, some sort of imprint of an older hand to it."

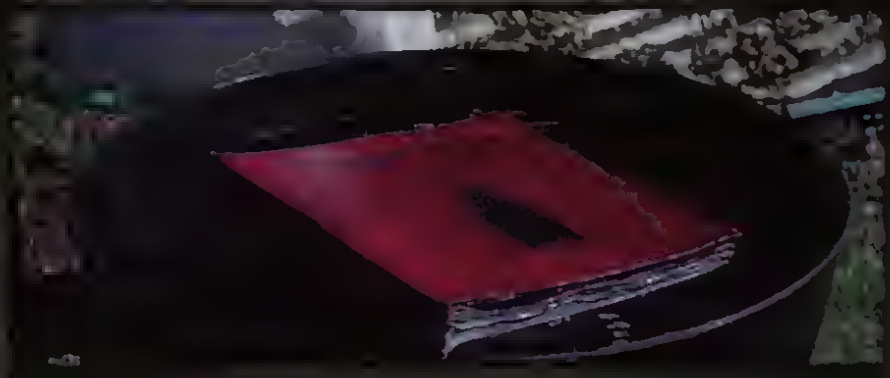
Kent composed the rhyming text of the book, which concerns a boogeyman that invades both the home and the mind of its victims. Juhasz created the mixed-media illustrations with inks, watercolours, coloured pencil and charcoals, and worked with a paper engineer to sort out the mechanics of the book's pop-up pages. He even opted to hand-paint the book's lettering when experiments with pre-existing fonts failed to produce the result he wanted. The painstaking process allowed him to devote many hours of attention to each individual image – a luxury he's rarely afforded in his animation work.

"It was just one book, so I got the chance to do one beautiful image, and then build it," he says. "With animation you have to keep re-making it."

The books that are seen in the film are handmade one-offs, but fans will hopefully have a chance to own their very own copy of *Mister Babadook*. This month will see the launch of an indiegogo campaign to finance a 5000-copy run of the storybook; if the project is funded, it will send Kent and Juhasz back to the drawing board to finish their pop-up horror tale.

"In the film, the book is burned and trashed, and you don't get to read the end of it," Juhasz points out. "I'm gonna have to do a few more illustrations and work with a paper engineer to finish off the rest of it, and maybe alter it slightly so it makes sense in book form. I'm really excited about that. When we put it all together, we thought, 'I think people would want this!' I just hope they don't actually read it to their kids."





Charbroiled Babadook: *The mysterious book is thrown on the barbeque in an attempt to get rid of it.*

able?" It was cockroaches and bugs, and it was an abstract kind of progression toward things that I love, which [includes] silent horror and the world of children's books.

You're on the money when you say Lon Chaney. The image of this smiling, gruesome face from *London After Midnight* – it's Chaney's actual face, but he's done work to contort it so it looks like a mask. For me, the Babadook is two-layered. It's covered – it's a mask, it's a wig, it's got a hat and gloves. You can't see its hands, you can't see its feet. It was very important that it felt like something sinister playing at being human. And then underneath that top layer was the real Babadook. Not the Mister Babadook, but the real Babadook, and Christ knows what that actually is. That was very important to me, those two layers. So the top layer has much more of a child-like, silent film, Georges Méliès, early horror kind of feel, and then the layer underneath is something very adult and very terrifying.

THE BABADOOK INCORPORATES FOOTAGE FROM THE FILMS OF MÉLIÈS AND OTHER SILENT FILMMAKERS. WHY WAS IT IMPORTANT TO USE THOSE CLIPS?

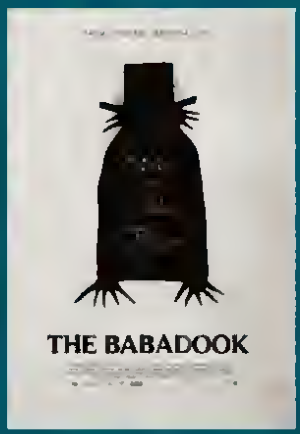
I borrowed so much of his technique and approach and style, I just wanted to put him in there. I consider it an enormous honour to have him in the film, and have his work in it. And it was also a way to get more of the Babadook in and to make that whole style more cohesive. There's another silent film artist in there who was equally as brilliant as Méliès, a Spanish guy called Segundo du Chomon, who never gets any recognition.

AND YOU TOOK OTHER CUES FROM MÉLIÈS AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES, BEYOND THE LOOK OF THE MONSTER...

Yeah, absolutely. Méliès' films have such a beautiful, childlike quality, but also a lot of them are quite sinister. I loved his in-camera tricks and I didn't want to use high-tech [special effects]; I wanted to use low-tech camera tricks, because it mirrored the world of the book. I've heard some people say, "Ah, the special effects aren't very good," and I say, "Yeah, that's the whole point!" It was smoothed in parts, but there was a commitment to doing everything in-camera. The effects are like a dream to me. I wanted to create something that wasn't CGI – that was all handmade. Just for my tastes, it's more disturbing. People say, "If you had a bigger budget, what would you have done?" And I say, "Probably the same, we'd have just done it a little bit slower."

YOU MENTIONED THE DREAM-LIKE QUALITY OF THE FILM, AND IT DEFINITELY PLAYS WITH THE IDEA OF REALITY AS SOMETHING THAT'S PLIABLE. THAT CALLS TO MIND A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET.

Yes, that was a big film for me as a young kid.



DO YOU THINK IT INFLUENCED THE BABADOOK?

Not consciously. My conscious influences were the silent horror films, the films of Polanski, [and] David Lynch, for his tone and his bravery in conveying a dream world and being more abstract and not being afraid of that. Films like *Lost Highway*, in particular, were a huge inspiration for me. But then you get to a certain point in preproduction where you don't want to look at films anymore, so I tried to throw those out and made a strong commitment and make it my film and not derivative of other filmmakers.

I'D LOVE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE STORYBOOK THAT'S USED IN THE FILM. HOW CLOSELY DID YOU WORK WITH ALEX JUHASZ, THE BOOK'S ILLUSTRATOR?



Evil Everywhere: *(Top to bottom) Something nasty stirs under the bed, and a scene that exemplifies the influence of expressionist silent films on* ***The Babadook****.*

We looked in Australia a lot [for an illustrator], but we couldn't find the right person. I kept using Alex's work as a reference, and then I said to [producer] Kristina Ceyton, "Why don't we just ask Alex?" He wanted to come to Australia and really loved the idea of the film, and so he came out and became a part of our very early preproduction. We started out with the book because, for me, the design of the film had to come from the world of the book so we needed to know what that looked like first. And then, as that book started to develop, the world of the film developed around it.

SO IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CINEMA AND LITERATURE THAT YOU FIND PARTICULARLY RELEVANT TO THE BABADOOK?

I wanted to find a way for the Babadook to come in through the child. For me, as a kid, storybooks held such an energy. I was so thrilled to read them and also scared by the stories in a lot of them, [such as] the Grimm Brothers' fairy tales. I just felt like it was a perfect way to introduce this creature that changes throughout the film and gains momentum. So yeah, in this instance I think it's very important, the connection. I also love the work of Lotte Reiniger, who was a beautiful cutout artist. She was an animator; she made allegedly the first full-length animation ever called *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*. She would sit there and cut out all of her images by hand, and they were stop-motion and they were absolutely beautiful. So that was my styling point. If you look at her monsters, they're really crazy and you can tell they're handmade. There's something really beautiful about them. She's a perfect example of the crossover between the world of books and the world of film.

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT DESIGNING THE WORLD OF THE BABADOOK, AND TRANSLATING THE LOOK OF THE STORYBOOK TO THE FILM?

I can't lay claim to creating all of that on my own. It took a collaboration with a really genius designer, Alex Holmes, and also a wonderful cinematographer, Radoslaw Ladczuk, to create the world of the film. I started off thinking, "Do I want black and white?" much to my producer's horror. [Laughs] And then I came to the conclusion that I didn't actually want to shoot in black and white as I'd done with *Monster*. I wanted to create a world that felt somehow alive, but only just, and that still felt very cold – that people would feel like they needed to put on a sweater in the cinema. So the choice was to reduce the colours, to make it black through to white, but also to add very cool blues and light pinks through to burgundy. You'll see some teal thrown in there, but otherwise, that's it. And that was all done on location and on set. I think gels and a wash in post are very modern looking, and I didn't want that. It nearly drove poor Alex, the production designer, into the hospital. But we all feel that it was worth it, and it gives the film a look that not many films have.

THE MOVIE HINGES ON TWO TERRIFIC PERFORMANCES: ESSIE DAVIS AS AMELIA, AND NOAH WISEMAN AS SAMUEL. ESSIE IS A VERY ACCOMPLISHED STAGE AND SCREEN ACTRESS, BUT HOW DID YOU GET SUCH A STRONG PERFORMANCE FROM A SIX-YEAR-OLD?

I spent two weeks alone with Noah. I took him to the zoo initially, and I told him the story of The Babadook – the G-rated version. I said, "So basically, Noah, in this film Sam is trying to save his mum, and the film is about the power of love." And his eyes lit up, and he said, "Oh, the power of love!" And after that, he was totally committed like no other actor I've ever seen. His mum is a child psychologist, so she really felt the importance of the story. She was a huge supporter. I was an actor, like Noah, from a very early age. And kids of that age, they need to see. You need to show them, in a way, what's going on. So that's what I did with him, and it was a very exhausting shoot. He didn't know what a fit was – I had to get down on the makeup van floor and have one, and then he knew exactly what to do. He brought so much to that role, just through his natural abilities. Essie also has an extraordinary natural gift, but she has many years of expertise and skill now, so she also really helped get that performance out of Noah. She's an amazing, extremely underrated actress. She's extraordinary.

SOME STRIKING HORROR MOVIES HAVE COME OUT OF AUSTRALIA IN THE LAST DECADE, SUCH AS WOLF CREEK, THE LOVED ONES AND SNOWTOWN. HOW DO YOU AND YOUR FILM FIT INTO THE COUNTRY'S CINEMATIC LANDSCAPE RIGHT NOW?

We have a lot of questions here at the moment. We have a new government that's very right wing, and they're very, "Who needs films? Australians don't make films; Americans make films." What they fail to realize is, we do make films, and we create an industry here that goes on to dominate in places like America. You look at Cate Blanchett and Geoffrey Rush and countless film technicians, cinematographers, directors, actors. For a small country, we have a huge profile out in the world. So there's a big battle here at the moment – and it's been going on for a century, to be honest – to protect our industry. In that sense, I feel very passionate. I'm very aware of it. But creatively, I don't really know what's going on in the rest of the country, and I don't really care. I don't mean that in a derogatory way; it's just that I'm very much making my own thing regardless. I don't really consider myself part of an Australian horror clique or anything like that.

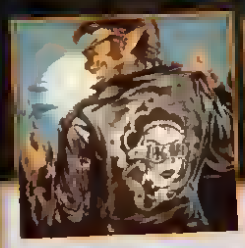
WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU? I HEAR YOU'RE WRITING A REVENGE FILM.

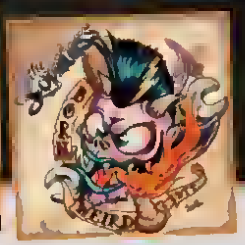
It's set in Tasmania in the 1920s. It's a horror world, but it's not a horror film. It's a frontier story, I guess. The character is a convict woman and it deals with our past. It deals with how violence affects women, both when they carry it out and when it's done to them. It's a film I feel very strongly about. It's gonna be a hard one to write – it's not an easy subject matter, but I think there's hope running through it, like in *The Babadook*.

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RESIDENT EVIL CREATOR SHINJI MIKAMI RETURNS TO THE SURVIVAL HORROR GENRE HE HELPED CREATE, WITH THE EVIL WITHIN



MONSTERS, MADNESS AND MELEE

MIKE BEARDSALL

GAME DIRECTOR SHINJI MIKAMI – BEST KNOWN AS THE CREATOR OF THE *RESIDENT EVIL* FRANCHISE – IS ON A MISSION TO BRING SURVIVAL HORROR BACK TO ITS TERRIFYING, PARASITE-INFESTED BEGINNINGS.

The genre itself has changed greatly in recent years, big budget franchises such as *Dead Space* have joined *Resident Evil* in becoming more action-oriented, sacrificing much of the suspense and mood in order to appeal to a wider audience. On the other hand, indie games like *Amnesia* and *Slender* have excluded combat altogether, delivering more in terms of tension and horror, but offering little in terms of actual action and gameplay. Inevitably, this has left gamers in a bit of a no man's land, wondering what the state of "survival horror" gaming is, and if that term still has any meaning.

Enter *The Evil Within*, Mikami's latest diabolical creation (just released by Tango Gameworks and Bethesda Softworks on PC, PS3, PS4, Xbox 360 and Xbox One), which he hopes will bring survival horror back to its roots.

"*The Evil Within* started out because I genuinely wanted to make a survival horror game that was true to my own definition of survival horror," he explains. "I imagined what it would be like to have a parasite with a high level of intelligence living in your brain, gradually eating away your memories and replacing or overwriting them with something else. And how scary that would be to tell a story through the person trying to recall their original memories."

Despite the skin-crawling premise, at first the project didn't quite gel as he expected. The developers just didn't think players would want to play a character infected by a parasite.

"The team hated the idea of a parasite – more like an insect – taking over a human mind," says Mikami, "so I scrapped that idea and ended with the current setting of *The Evil Within*. What would it be like to be trapped in the mind of the killer? And what if I incorporated elements of memory into that equation? I saw a lot of potential, not only from a story perspective, but also from a visual perspective. The game title reflects this whole idea."

In *The Evil Within*, players step into the shoes of detective Sebastian Castellanos who – along with his partners Julie Kidman and Joseph Oda – travels to the Beacon Mental Hospital to investigate a grisly mass murder. Upon arrival, the trio discovers the



butchered remains of fellow officers scattered across the floor. After witnessing security footage of the massacre, they are ambushed by an unknown force that knocks Sebastian unconscious.

He awakens in a twisted world that he must survive and escape – a place where the very fabric of reality seems to shift at will, traps lie in wait around every corner, and all sorts of nightmarish creatures stalk the shadows. ("To give much more away than that would spoil the experience," cautions Mikami.) Such creatures include the Haunted: zombie-like beings covered in all manner of mutations and injuries, and wielding a variety of sharp melee weapons. There's also the infamous Boxman, a k.a. The Keeper, a large humanoid who carries a meat tenderizer and wears a safe wrapped in barbed wire on his head.

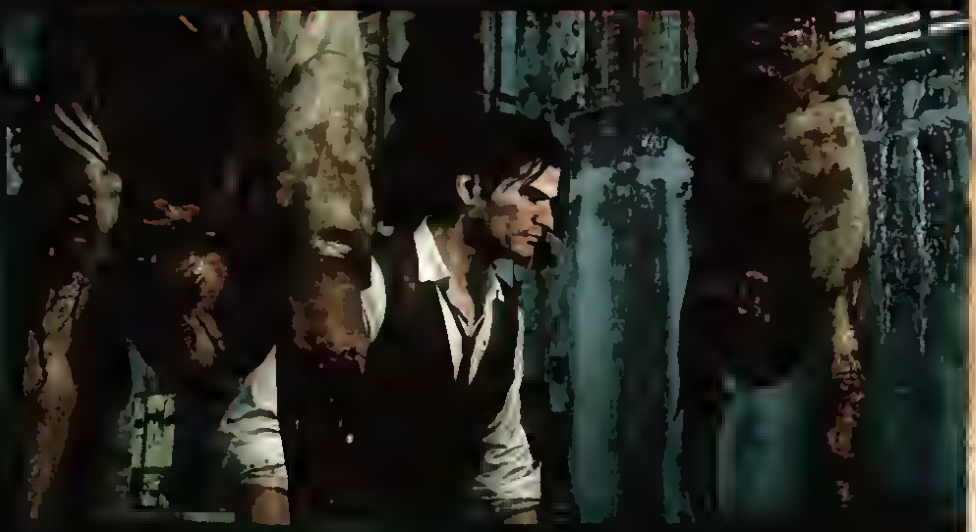
The images of a relentless hulking monster with a giant weapon and big chunk of metal on his head, plus the imagery of barbed wire, strongly invokes the world of *Silent Hill*. But Mikami says those similarities are more coincidental than planned.

"Rather than the fear that comes from something physical, the psychological fear that emanates from the design really matches the horror theme so I decided to go with the barbed-wire style. But I didn't set out to make it look like *Silent Hill*."

Against these kind of adversaries, Sebastian seems to barely have a fighting chance, which is all part of the challenge, of course.

"The player will be able to use ordinary weapons, such as pistols and shotguns," points out Mikami, "but a weapon unique to this game is the crossbow. [Gamers] will be able to create different kinds of warheads for the weapon by collecting parts [they] earn by disarming traps in the game."

Also on hand are melee weapons, grenades and proximity mines available for use, but more important than any of these is a simple box of matches. In this game, burning a downed enemy will make sure they stay down and will also conserve rare and precious ammo for when players really need it.



As the player progresses through the game, they will come upon a substance simply known as "green gel." The viscous material will allow you to upgrade Sebastian's abilities, such as improving his proficiency with a certain weapon or giving him the ability to run for longer distances. The gel isn't just given to you however, so you'll need to explore every shadowy nook and cranny if you want to find enough of it to give Sebastian a fighting chance.

Like other survival horror games, *The Evil Within* also contains scenarios in which bullets alone can't save the day. A quick mind is necessary to solve the game's various macabre puzzles, including one particularly visceral one that requires the correct placement of needles within the brain of a still-living person.

Through all of this, Sebastian is constantly stalked by his nemesis, an inter-dimensional being known as Ruvik. This seemingly indestructible figure appears at random intervals throughout the game and signals instant death for Sebastian should he fall into its hands. The hooded figure's appearance, often heralded by flickering lights or intense music, complicates the game as Sebastian is forced to spend precious energy and resources trying to escape him. This new element shows that Mikami – who counts among his favourite games of all time *Clock Tower* (1995, Japanese SNES), *Clock Tower 2* (1996, Japanese PlayStation), *Siren* (2003, PlayStation 2) and the 1989 RPG *Sweet Home* (Famicon, a.k.a. the Japanese version of the NES) – is still developing the formula that he helped pioneer with *Resident Evil 4*, widely considered to be the best entry in the franchise and one of the best games of all time.

"I think it's safe to say that [title] has had a great impact," he acknowledges. "The biggest parallel is the fact that both games have their intense moments, but also have moments that allow you to break that tension. Both have a scary atmosphere, but have fun gameplay. I've put a lot of effort in making the balance just right. So in a way the approach taken in both games is very similar, because both were made with my definition of survival horror in mind."

In fact, a number of gameplay elements from *RE4* are evident in *TEW*, including the shooting mechanics and distinctive third person over the shoulder camera style.

Cont'd on p.28



WE CHART THE EVOLUTION OF SURVIVAL HORROR OVER THE PAST THREE DECADES

NIGHTMARES IN CODE

by MIKE BEARDSALL

COMPUTER GAME GENRES ARE USUALLY DEFINED BY THEIR BASIC MECHANICS – A PLATFORM GAME, A FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER, MMORPG (MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME), ETC. – EXCEPT WHEN IT COMES TO SURVIVAL HORROR.

As a genre, survival horror is unique in that it's largely defined by its non-gameplay elements such as mood, storyline and psychological aspects, making it harder to pinpoint. The label itself didn't exist until the arrival of *Resident Evil* in the mid-'90s, but games designed around surviving in frightening environments have existed long before that.

Going back to 1982, *Haunted House* for the Atari 2600 is considered by many to be the first example of a true survival horror video game. In it, the player is tasked with collecting three pieces of an urn hidden within a dark mansion. The player is represented only by a pair of eyes as he navigates pitch black corridors while avoiding the ghosts, bats and tarantulas that dwell within. The lack of direct combat and the heightened tension from never knowing where your enemies are hiding allowed *Haunted House* to lay the groundwork for what the genre would become.

Around the same time, a number of games based on horror movies were released for the console, including *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Halloween*, from Wizard Video in 1982 and 1983, respectively. While the former had you play as the villain, mindlessly slaughtering innocent pixels, it was *Halloween* that more closely resembled what we would now consider a survival horror title. Gamers played a nameless babysitter trying to protect a child, while Michael Myers stalks the house. Due to their adult content, both titles had poor sales at the time of their release and have since become rare collector's items.

In 1989, Capcom released *Sweet Home* exclusively in Japan for the Famicom (known in the West as the original 8-bit Nintendo Entertainment System). This turn-based RPG, developed as a tie-in to the film of the same name, follows a team of treasure hunters who explore a dilapidated mansion in search of valuable paintings left behind by the eccentric artist who once lived there. In the game, the player controls a party of five characters, each with a unique item necessary to finish the game, such as a camera, a first-aid kit and, oddly enough, a vacuum cleaner. Characters could die, and the number of survivors at the end of the game determined which of the five endings was shown to players. The concept of multiple possible endings and *Sweet Home*'s use of environment to tell the story were major elements that would come to define the survival horror subgenre.

That same year, Dynamix released a new kind of 2D shooter for the Commodore 64 that drew heavily from cinematic influences while further cementing the template for the genre. *Project Firestart* tasked players with investigating a derelict space station populated by the monstrous results of genetic experimentation that took place there. The tension was established by startling musical cues and deliberately weak weaponry, designed to be so ineffective that gamers would put bullet after bullet into the chests of the beasties, only to have them lurch ever closer. *PF* was met



with critical praise, but due to issues in development and limited marketing, never really found an audience.

The genre wouldn't fully break into the mainstream market until 1992 with the release of Infogrames' *Alone In the Dark* for Windows DOS, which became a continuing franchise of titles (a new one is slated for 2015). Playing as a private eye investigating a mystery-filled mansion in the 1920s, and borrowing story cues from the works of H.P. Lovecraft while using gameplay elements similar to *Project Firestart*, *Alone in the Dark* was the first 3D survival horror game and was met with near universal praise upon its release. Several sequels (and a terrible film adaptation) would follow, but none of them lived up to the original game.

Another big step forward came with the debut of the original Playstation, its technological improvements meant that developers could do much more in terms of visuals and sound design. The release of *Resident Evil* (another game about exploring a shadowy mansion) in 1996 would be the first showcase of what the new hardware could do, while building upon the thematic groundwork set by previous genre titles. Series creator Shinji Mikami names *Sweet Home* as a direct inspiration for him, but the influence of *Alone in the Dark* can certainly be felt as well. It's common practice among Japanese game marketing departments to invent a new genre in order to make a game stand out, and *Resident Evil* is often credited as the first game to bill itself as "survival horror."

Toward the end of the Playstation's lifecycle, another high profile survival horror game would emerge in the form of 1999's *Silent Hill*. Developed by Konami, *Silent Hill* – which sees the protagonist searching for his daughter in a surreal, abandoned town – pushed the system to its limits using real-time graphics instead of pre-rendered backgrounds. This limited the player's field of view, which only added to the terror and atmosphere, as dark shadows and thick fog enhanced a sense of isolation and vulnerability. The sequel, *Silent Hill 2*, was released in 2001 and would expand upon the success of the first. While containing many of the same design aspects, *SH2* took full advantage of the new Playstation 2 hardware by creating much larger and more elaborate environments. It also marked the debut of series mascot Pyramid Head, who stalked the player throughout the game. While the sequel was both a critical and financial success, the latest iteration of the *Alone in the Dark* franchise – released that same year – failed to capture an audience, proving that the genre had to continue to innovate to compete, rather than relying on formulas.

Game designers, however, were still coming up with fresh ideas for survival horror. Temco's *Fatal Frame* (2001) proved to be a new take on the traditional haunted house story. Drawing heavily from Japanese ghost stories and urban legends, it put players into the mysterious Himuro Mansion, where high school student Miku must search for her older brother. Facing a horde of ghosts and armed only with a supernatural camera, she must exorcise the spirits by getting as close to them as possible and snapping their picture. This result is a game that actually rewards players for being scared.







Adapt Or Die: *(Clockwise from top)* ***Silent Hill, Alone in the Dark, Eternal Darkness****, and (opposite, top to bottom)* ***Amnesia: The Dark Descent*** *and* ***Project Firestart***

Another innovator was 2002's *Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem*, which was released exclusively for the Nintendo Gamecube. In the game, your character discovers a haunted book as she investigates her grandfather's murder in yet another creepy old mansion. What made it unique was a "sanity mechanic" making the game repeatedly break the fourth wall, altering the volume, emptying the computer's inventory and even appearing to crash at random intervals – all while the player battles ancient evil in various places throughout history. This extra element of mind-fuckery made it feel like gamers were actually losing their grip on reality.

As the 2000s crept along, survival horror developed into a louder, more boisterous version of its former self. Gone were the vulnerable protagonists and drawn-out tension that had become the hallmark of the genre. Established franchises such as *Resident Evil* ventured further into the realm of third-person shooter, and even introduced co-op mechanics that allowed players to team up with their buds, thereby eliminating the sense of isolation completely. 2008 marked the debut of a new franchise, *Dead Space*, which is set in 2508 and positions the player as an engineer in assigned to explore and repair a ship that was attacked by monsters. The franchise was planned to bring the genre back to its roots with its isolated setting, claustrophobic environments, and a prevailing sense of dread, but it didn't sell as well as publishers EA had hoped, and its sequels would be far more sci-fi/action-oriented.

It seemed that triple-A publishers weren't willing to take a chance on a pure survival horror game, so it fell to the independent game developers to fill the void. *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* was released in 2010 by Frictional Games and almost immediately gained a cult following thanks to the ominous atmosphere surrounding a protagonist struggling to regain his memory while repelling a force that haunts him. Championed by many as one of the scariest games ever, it heralded a new wave of independent and hugely popular horror games that include the likes of *Slender* (2012, based on the mysterious figure known as the Slender Man) and *Outlast* (2013) – which sets players, who are armed with only a flashlight and video camera, in a psychiatric hospital full of monsters – harkening back to the genre's origins of vulnerable protagonists and atmospheric settings.

Like gaming itself, survival horror will continue to change, and what does and doesn't come under that term will always inspire debate. But with tears constantly shifting – plus the continuing advancements in game technology – it's up to a new wave of game developers to find new ways of scaring us.

As Mikami explains it; "By being able to see your player character and his animations, you have a better sense of what the player is doing and how the character is reacting to situations and his surrounding environments."

He also admits to taking inspiration from Martin Scorsese's *Shutter Island* for the setting, and from old Japanese horror folklore and ghost stories for the creature and environment designs.

With more and more survival horror games doing away with combat, *The Evil Within* stands as an exception where it used to be the rule.

"To me, pure survival horror is a game where – not only do you run away but also when you have ammo you can overcome fear by confronting and destroying your enemies," says Mikami. "Survival horror fundamentally is built on these two contradicting themes A game that only lets you run away and hide is [simply] a 'horror' game, in my opinion, .. *The Evil Within* is bringing survival horror back to its roots. When I say roots, it's based on my definition of the genre, and that is a game that's not only scary, but also fun and entertaining with good gameplay."



THE ART OF THE EVIL WITHIN

Bethesda Games
Dark Horse Books

No detail was spared for *The Evil Within*, as evidenced by this expansive hardcover art book. To accompany the game's release, Dark Horse brings us *The Art of the Evil Within*: a glossy, in-depth look at every aspect of the title's visual design, from characters and creatures, to buildings and architecture, to the art used in marketing and promotions.



It begins with an overview of the main characters, and we're shown early concepts of them. For example, Julie Kidman, our main protagonist's partner in fighting crime, was originally written as a prisoner of the Beacon Mental Hospital. As such, we get to see various incarnations of her, including wearing a hospital gown, a police uniform and skintight dominatrix garb. This same design progression is included for the villains (referred to in-game as "The Haunted"), who are genetically mutated and generously mutilated – including "The Keeper," who wears a blood-spattered apron and a safe wrapped in barbed wire on his head, and "Laura," a four-armed woman who scuttles around, spiderlike, on sharp claws.

Of course, this is only part of creating an unsettling atmosphere: *The Art from the Evil Within* also includes environmental and architectural design. The game starts in a sprawling gothic asylum, and paintings of the interior and exterior show prototypes of Beacon Mental's reception area, and a garden that isn't found in game. There's also a misty abandoned village, as well as a creepy graveyard and an enormous old church filled with runes. Less obvious design elements in props such as police badges, newspaper pages and control panels round out the book, along with a gallery of promotional posters for *The Evil Within* and an afterword by lead designer Ikumi Nakamura, who also provides notes throughout the tome.

It's an impressive work, but note that it contains serious spoilers. If you're as keen on art and design as you are at immersing yourself in a horrifying simulated experience, you'll dig *The Art of the Evil Within* .. just wait 'til after you've played the game to read it.

ANDREA SUBISSATI







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HORNS STARS DANIEL RADCLIFFE AND JUNO TEMPLE JOIN DIRECTOR ALEXANDRE AJA TO DISH A FEW DETAILS ON THEIR ADAPTATION OF JOE HILL'S FABLE ABOUT DARK SECRETS AND EVEN DARKER POWERS

The Devil Inside and Out

by MONICA S. KUEBLER



IT'S A REAL DRAG BEING THE TOWN PARIAH – JUST ASK *HORNS*' IG PERRISH. HIS GIRLFRIEND MERRIN IS DEAD AND EVERYONE BELIEVES HE MURDERED HER, MAKING HIS LIFE A NIGHTMARE.

He's drowning in his sorrows – and alcohol – until one morning when a pair of horns mysteriously sprouts out of his head. They have the power to make people reveal their deepest, darkest thoughts to him, and Ig quickly surmises that they can also help him discover the identity of Merrin's real killer – along with a whole host of other ugly truths along the way.

Horns (which just opened in theatres and on VOD from VVS Films in Canada, and RADiUS-TWC in the US) is adapted from the 2010 novel by Joe Hill (*Heart-Shaped Box*, *Locke & Key*). The Bram Stoker Award-nominated book really got its hooks into director Alexandre Aja (*Haute Tension*, *Piranha 3D*).

"I read the book, like many, many people and it was a very strange feeling because I was turning the pages and I was, like, 'Okay, how is it possible that three pages ago I was cracking up and laughing and now I've become very emotional?,' and then in the next chapter I was getting really scared," says Aja during a one-on-one interview at last year's Toronto International Film Festival, where the movie premiered. "It was just like a ride into different feelings and different emotions. It was really unexpected and unusual. So I knew in a way at that time that I had to make this movie; it was so much my world, my kind of allegoric fable – dark humour, all those elements

are very much what I am always wanting to do."

Aside from an allegory, *Horns* could also be called a love story, a revenge tale, a whodunnit and a modern-day fable. It's brimming with religious imagery, questions of morality and the occasional burst of ultraviolence. It straddles dark fantasy, horror and magic realism and has, at its core, an incredibly troubled unreliable narrator who's so far gone into his own misery that he's no longer sure what he's capable of (and wonders, at times, if maybe he did commit murder).

In the project's earliest stages, Shia LaBeouf was attached but left before the script was complete and the formal casting process had begun. As it turned out, Aja didn't have to search too long for his new lead.

"I was looking to all the new, young generation of actors and I knew Daniel read the script, loved the script, read the book, loved the book, and wanted to be in the movie," he says. "So we met and it took me one meeting. I mean, it was obvious, he was exactly that character in many, many ways. Ig Perrish is, as is Daniel Radcliffe, a good person, and Daniel is really good. He's a great human being, and to do the allegory of the fallen angel, to do the allegory of the whole journey into the dark side and finding out who killed your girlfriend, you need someone who starts in a really good place, and Daniel is that kind of person."

Not only did Radcliffe consider it a fantastic role, but it gave him the opportunity to play a contemporary American male for the first time in his career.

"Ig as a figure is so wonderful," says the actor of his attraction to the character. "His intelligence and his compassion and what happens to him and the fact that, you know, it's just about what some people do when the love of their life is stripped away from them in a violent way, as his has been."

To prepare for the role, which called for Radcliffe to traverse the emotional spectrum, the actor broke down the script scene by scene, paying close attention to the nuances of his character's journey. Additionally, he spent considerable time with co-star Juno Temple (who plays Merrin), building back stones for their respective characters and their relationship, and also attempting to find commonalities between his own life and that of Ig.

"I can't relate to being hated by loads of people," he notes, "but I can certainly relate to walking into a room and the room stopping. I know what that feels like."



Anguish And Anger: *(Clockwise from top) Ig (Daniel Radcliffe) searches for answers to his girlfriend's death, a desperate protagonist, and Heather Graham as diner waitress Veronica*

Aside from its tortured protagonist, part of what makes *Horns* so refreshing, and a bit of an oddity among horror films, is that while most genre movies concern evil corrupting purity, goodness and/or love, *Horns* – despite its revenge movie trappings – turns that popular thematic conceit inside out. While the horns that Ig grows make him look the part of a devil and grant him great power over people, the choice of what do with that power is ultimately up to him, turning the film into something of a meditation on the nature of good and evil.



"I think it's [a subject that's] compelling for everyone," says Aja. "I think this is the basest subject for everyone and I think the feeling of why people kind of get into the movie, and why they like it and they feel that it's talking about them, is that we all have that confrontation between good and evil inside us, and we all have to make that choice, and we all have to say, 'Okay, you know what, that thought right now, I'm going to have to put that on the side and, you know, never pick it up. [Laughs] And I will take the decision and I will rise or fall.' it's always that kind of going up to the light or going down to the darkness, and I think it's everyone's choice in everyone's life, and the fable here is really about this."

Temple agrees: "[Ig's using the horns] for finding out a really devilish act – it's what I love so much about the movie. It's like using

good for bad and bad for good, and it's all kind of criss-crossed all over." The word "fable," even turned on its head as it is in Hill's novel, is an excellent choice to describe *Horns*, and the cinematography of Aja's film embraces it. Some sequences are shot in hard detail, while others (notably Ig's memories) are soft and highly stylized, as if they are being viewed through literal rose-coloured glasses. Flashbacks play a key role in the narrative structure and are the only parts of the film in which Merrin is seen.

"[The story is told] through Ig's point of view of me," explains Temple. "I was shot very specifically to be this kind of ethereal, angelic-type memory, and then you have these moments where I'm not – these moments where I'm breaking his heart and he doesn't know why."

Aja also employs cross-cutting (i.e. jumping between two scenes in quick succession) to flip between his protagonist's emotional extremes – juxtapositions that are compelling and powerful, as well as beautiful and evocative.

"A photographer that I really like is Gregory Crewdson," Aja says of his influences. "He is an American photographer who is really into sculpting light and doing things that are really mythical in a very Americana setting – and the world of Gustave Doré. You know, with [Doré's] illustration of *Paradise Lost* and that kind of war of angels and stuff. I wanted to create a biblical or, if you want, a bridge between Milton's book and *Twin Peaks*; something with a very American identity, but at the same time has a biblical feel to it. Movie-wise I was really into *Blue Velvet*, so it was an obvious choice for me to ask Frederick Elmes, who is David Lynch's DP, to come and do the photography for me."

Compared to Aja's previous directorial outings, the bloodshed in *Horns* – despite its R rating – could be considered tame. But the movie's violence proves shocking nonetheless, precisely because it's infrequent, and because when it does occur, it's utterly uncompromising.

"It's funny because there is one scene where one of the characters gets his head exploded, and it's not me, it's right in the book," asserts Aja. "I really like that kind of violence and brutality coming from nowhere, and the same with the dark humour. You're in the drama and all of a sudden something very, very funny happens. I like that kind of feeling like you don't know where you're going. I tried to reproduce the exact same experience I had reading the book, where turning the pages I didn't know what's coming."

Making *Horns* also brought with it a new experience for Aja: it's the first time the director didn't work from his own script. He did, however, liaise extensively with Hill about adapting his novel and provided input on the drafts provided by screenwriter Keith Bunin.

"It was interesting because I got more distance," he allows. "I kept a better sense of, 'Okay, that works and that doesn't work,' and Keith did an amazing job to find a way to fit a very big, dense novel into a two-hour movie. I would say my contribution [was to] go back to the book and say, 'You have to bring this back, and this, and this.' We did that for almost a year, being sure that the best things from the novel would be translated to the big screen."

The resulting film remains largely faithful to the book until the third act, when it begins to diverge. One of the biggest changes to the narrative sees the magical "treehouse of the mind," which plays a pivotal recurring role in the book, get a makeover into an actual, physical treehouse that now stands at the epicentre of some of the story's most significant moments.

"We had a long conversation with Joe about the treehouse of the mind in the book and about the meaning of it," says Aja. "And I think sometimes you can fold very allegoric and kind of symbolic figures in a book that don't really translate into a movie narration, so we had to change that."

He adds, "Joe is very happy with the movie. The book is the book and the movie is the movie, but at the end of the day I don't see people being disappointed after reading the novel and watching the movie because the spirit is there, the essence is there."



Pointed Moments: *Ig has his new horns examined, and (top) a warm memory of Merrin*



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DAVE ALEXANDER ARIEL FISHER PHIL BROWN SEAN PLUMMER

ALLELUIA

(France/Belgium)

Fabrice Du Welz

Seven years after *Vinyan*, writer/director Fabrice Du Welz returns with a loose remake of *The Honeymoon Killers*. Lola Dueñas and Laurent Lucas (*Calvaire*) star as a couple who meet online and find love seducing and murdering rich old biddies. It's another of Du Welz's twisted character studies charting a relationship that turns psychotic. The director shoots in a loose, almost French New Wave, style packed with references and stylistic diversions (including, oddly, a musical sequence), yet never loses sight of the gruesome tale and tragically lost souls at the center. It's a nasty little love story for the black-hearted curmudgeon in us all. PB

CUB

(Belgium)

Jonas Govaerts

As the tagline says, "Be Prepared." A scout troop on a isolated weekend retreat runs afoul of a feral, masked child and a subterranean brute who's wired the forest with traps that crush, impale and kill. It's up to the unpopular kid to save the rest of them, but he'll have to descend into the bad guy's subterranean lair first. The inclusion of animal cruelty in *Cub* isn't necessary, but otherwise the shocking violence (there are kids killed aplenty) keeps the blood pumping (and gushing) in this sometimes wonky hybrid tribute to American-style boogeyman, slasher and survival horror. DA

THE EDITOR

(Canada)

Adam Brooks and Matthew Kennedy

Winnipeg film collective Astron-6 (*Father's Day*, *Manborg*) rocked Midnight Madness with the giallo homage/satire *The Editor*. Co-director Adam Brooks stars as a mutilated film editor suspected of killing the cast and crew of his latest slasher flick. Paz de la Huerta (*Nurse 3D*) camps it up as his washed-up movie star wife, while genre vet Udo Kier and *The Human Centipede II* star Laurence R. Harvey make amusing cameos. The Astron-6 boys obviously love giallo enough to poke fun at the genre's tropes, from bad English dubbing to misogynistic violence. Not scary but scarily entertaining. SP

ELECTRIC BOOGALOO: THE WILD, UNTOLD STORY OF CANNON FILMS

(Australia)

Mark Hartley

In the '80s, a video store just wasn't a video store without the exploitation madness of Cannon Films. And while the company's horror output fell behind its sexploitation and action movie output, it did gift us the cult weirdo Tobe Hooper titles *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, *Lifeforce* and *Invaders From Mars*. Hooper is one among scores of filmmakers, actors and former business associates interviewed by Mark Hartley (*Not Quite Hollywood*, *Machete Maidens Unleashed*), who tell the Icarus-like tale of a company that melted down under the weight of its own ambitions. Often hilarious, occasionally inspiring and always fascinating. DA

IT FOLLOWS

(USA)

David Robert Mitchell

There's something about *It Follows* that feels like a bad dream. A demon is after Jay (Maika Monroe), and it walks towards her *ad nauseum*, giving audiences that nightmarish sensation of trudging through some invisible sludge when you mean to run away. But you can't run, either from the demon or this stilted plot. Rather than providing humor or satire in a film about sexually-transmitted demonic possession, we're given the story completely straight and without much edge. While the jump scares are plentiful and effective, it all ends disappointingly vague and unfulfilled. AF

OVER YOUR DEAD BODY

(Japan)

Takashi Miike

Audition director Takashi Miike makes a triumphant return to horror in this gooey (and meta) adaptation of the centuries-old Japanese ghost story "Yotsuya Kaidan," about an unemploy-

able samurai who betrays his wife and child when offered the chance to marry a wealthy man's daughter. Ko Shibasaki (*Battle Royale*) plays Miyuki, the star of a theatrical adaptation of the legend, which co-stars her talented but untrustworthy boyfriend Kosuke (Ebizo Ichikawa). Soon, fiction and reality merge as Miyuki is betrayed by Kosuke, leading to a bloody conclusion that evokes the weirdness of *Audition* and the limb-lopping of *Ichi the Killer*. SP

[REC]4: APOCALYPSE

(Spain)

Jaume Balagueró

[Rec]4: Apocalypse abandons the comedy of *[Rec]3: Genesis* in favour of a return to the Spanish zombie franchise's horror roots, but does so with only modest levels of imagination or enthusiasm. Here, Angela (Manuela Velasco) wakes up on a freighter-turned-floating medical lab where scientists want to isolate the evil they suspect is inside her. Of course the plague gets loose, and soon the infected soldiers are hunting our heroes. But do we care? Not so much. *[Rec]4* mostly eschews explaining the religious nature of the plague for modestly satisfying action sequences. The least ferocious installment of the series. SP

SHREW'S NEST

(Spain)

Juanfer Andrés and Esteban Roel

One of the best TIFF genre offerings this year, *Shrew's Nest* is the kind of perversely haunting fable only the Brothers Grimm could aptly replicate. Vividly referencing *Misery* (1990), the tension coils snakelike until the third and final act, unleashing itself in a flurry of blood and rage. Macarena Gómez is a revelation as elder agoraphobic sister Montse. She skillfully slips in and out of maniacal madness, until she is tragically consumed by her demons. It's a rare gem that widens eyes equally with delight and terror. AF

SPRING

(USA)

Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead

Showing great maturation with their last feature, *Resolution*, Benson and Moorhead have made an unconventional love story that defies genre categorization. Equal parts Richard Linklater's *Before Sunrise* (1995) and monster movie, *Spring* elegantly breaks with convention. It delivers a science-based creature feature laced with earnest humor, humility and romance. The dialogue flows naturally, changing tone on a dime without ever sacrificing quality. The combination of beautiful cinematography and an expertly crafted script with Lou Taylor Pucci (*Evil Dead*) and Nadia Hilker's exemplary chemistry makes *Spring* unmissable. AF

TEEN LUST

(Canada)

Blaine Thurier

The New Pornographers' Blaine Thurier (*A Gun to the Head*) returns with yet another mediocre movie as writer/director. This time, he spins a yarn about a high school senior who desperately needs to lose his virginity because his parents are in a Satanic cult and will sacrifice him to the dark lord if his nethers remain untouched. Not a bad concept for a horror-flavored teen sex comedy, the trouble is that Thurier's approach is too politely Canadian to ever be as raunchy as required, or dark enough to score scares. Yet the whole bland endeavor is almost saved by a hysterically gothic turn from Carey Elwes as the cult leader who nails the right tone as an actor better than Thurier ever manages as writer or director. PB

TUSK

(USA)

Kevin Smith

No one could have predicted that the *Clerks* guy would become a horror director, yet here Kevin Smith is with his second genre offering, *Tusk*. It's a body horror tale in which Justin Long's slacker character is surgically turned into a walrus by a ranting Michael Parks, and Johnny Depp pops up as a French-Canadian investigator. Smith's usual shortcomings apply (too talky, uneven pacing, excessive in-jokes, etc.), yet he's delivered a deeply twisted tale with unsettling moments and an unexpectedly moving finale. If you can stomach the expected Smith flaws and Depp at his most Deppian, it's one of the most intriguing films of the year. PB

WHAT WE DO IN THE SHADOWS

(USA/New Zealand)

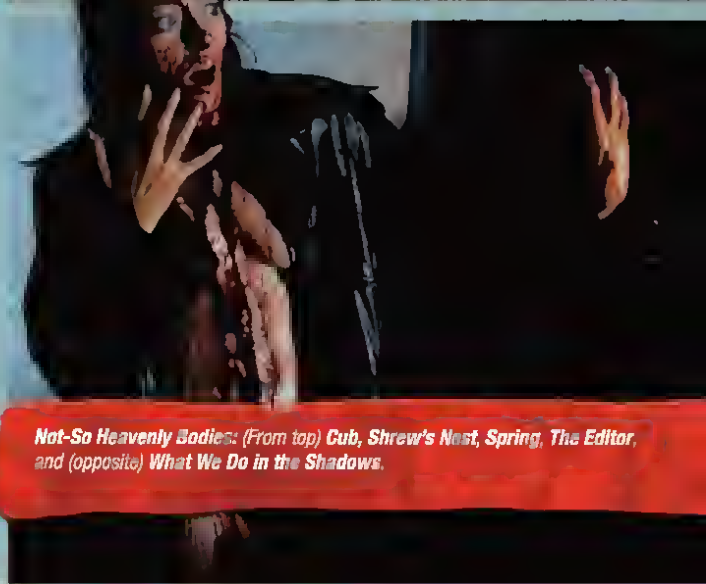
Jemaine Clement and Taika Waititi

Made by half of the Flight of the Conchords musical duo, Jemaine Clement, and fellow New Zealand actor Taika Waititi, *What We Do in the Shadows* brings the full, hilarious force of dry Kiwi comedy to bear on vampire mythology. Four undead flatmates ranging in age from a couple hundred to 8000 years old, argue over whose turn it is to do the (blood-stained) dishes, try to get ready for a night out without being able to see themselves in a mirror, and avoid confrontations with local werewolves. You'll root for these dramatic bloodsuckers, laugh your human asses off and never, ever think of a sandwich the same way again. DA









Not-So Heavenly Bodies: *(From top)* ***Cub, Shrew's Nest, Spring, The Editor,*** *and (opposite)* ***What We Do in the Shadows.***

MEMENTO MORGUE



tiff.

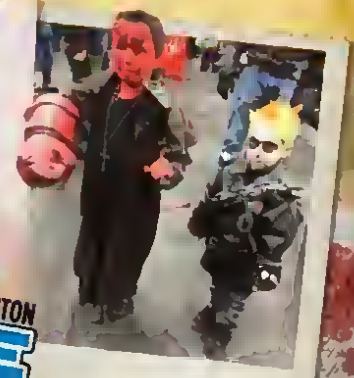
Before the world premiere of **The Editor** *Rue Morgue*'s G[illegible] and his wife Nicole hang out with members of Astron-6 (L–R) Brooks Conor Sweeney and Matthew Kennedy





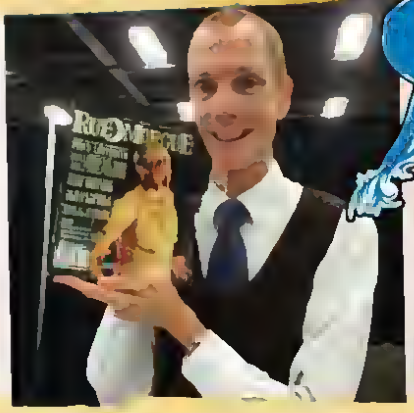


What We Do in the Shadows co star and co director Jemaine Clement with Midnight Madness programmer Colin Geddes



(L–R) Xenomorphs bust a move, **RM**'s Dave Alexander hosts the Alice Cooper panel, and a pint-sized Hellboy and Ghostrider pose for pics.





THE EDMONTON EXPO



(L–R) Dave and **RM**'s Andrea Subissati at the booth, Doug Jones shows off the **Pan's Labyrinth** issue featuring him on the cover, and Dave with **Hannibal**'s Mads Mikkelsen

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WHAT A DOLL

ANNABELLE

Starring Ward Horton, Annabelle Wallis and Alfre Woodard
Directed by John Leonetti
Written by Gary Dauberman
Warner

When *The Conjuring* brought home over $300 million for Warner Brothers, it was inevitable that the studio would try spin a franchise out of the project. Too bad the studio's creepy doll franchise kickstarter *Annabelle* is just as impersonal and predictable as the project's origin story suggests.

Annabelle Wallis and Ward Horton star as a Ken and Barbie couple expecting a baby whose '60s suburban dream house existence is disrupted by the film's only genuinely unnerving sequence, when their neighbors' prodigal daughter returns home with a Charlie Manson-esque cult leader of a boyfriend. The neighbours are killed, the pregnant Wallis is stabbed, and her doll Annabelle is satanically cursed in the process. From there, Wallis and Horton move into a *Rosemary's Baby*-style apartment where their infant is haunted by an *Insidious*-esque demon who follows their creepy doll Annabelle. A priest and a friendly demonic bookshop owner eventually offer help. The movie is essentially a checklist of scenes, ideas and scares that you've seen before in other, better movies.



Leonetti's experience with the camera (he shot several of James Wan's movies, including *The Conjuring*) ensures that the set pieces are at least competently staged, yet this movie is no *Conjuring*. Wan's unexpected horror blockbuster may have done little more than recreate classic horror tropes, but at least he was a skilled enough technician/storyteller to turn that movie into an unrelenting jump scare factory. *Annabelle*, on the other hand, is awkwardly paced and undercooked. It never settles into a consistent rhythm or develops an intriguing backstory. It's just a cut and paste job that has only one consistently creepy element: that bizarre doll that spawned the movie in the first place. Annabelle herself might one day be at the center of an effective mainstream horror movie if a talented filmmaker is able to weave a decent story around her. Sadly, this movie isn't it, but if we're lucky, maybe one of the inevitable sequels will deliver the goods.

PHIL BROWN

FORD NATION

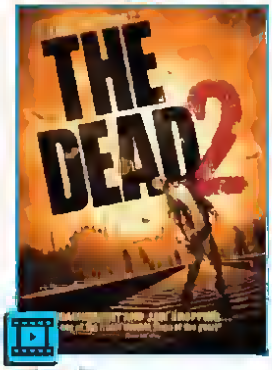
THE DEAD 2

Starring Joseph Millson, Meenu Mishra and Anand Goyal
Written and directed by the Ford Brothers
Anchor Bay

Back in 2010, *The Dead* received much love from horror fans, apparently enough to warrant this sequel. But other than the zombie film's unique setting (Africa), there was little else to recommend it, courtesy of thin characterization, slow pacing and iffy acting.

Still, sibling writer-directors Jon and Howard Ford can be congratulated for crafting a sequel that outdoes the original in every way. Not only is it bigger, it is *better*, with real characters, strong performances and genuine moments of suspense and pathos, making for 94 minutes of heartfelt entertainment.

Joseph Millson (*Penny Dreadful*) stars as Nicholas Burton, an American engineer working in India when the African zombie outbreak hits. As an American, Burton is offered a way out but is determined to find his pregnant girlfriend Ishani (Meenu Mishra) first. To that end, he enlists the help of a local orphan boy (Anand Goyal) to make the 300-mile trip to Mumbai. Our hero cuts down countless undead along the way and faces moral choices that test not only his strength but his humanity.



The Fords do a good job of balancing zombie action with character moments that lend the film an emotional heft we don't see much in the genre. Millson plays Burton as a man haunted by bad decisions, while Mishra makes her character sympathetic as the local knocked up by a foreigner. First-time actor Goyal is not only the stereotypical "cute kid" but believable as an orphan longing for a father figure.

Tellingly, *The Dead 2* comes off as more than cultural tourism. Western notions about the undead and Hindi understandings of karma are incorporated into



The Dead 2

the script, giving a patina of spiritual understanding in and among the expected scenes of shambling walkers. The Fords also take full advantage of India's stunning scenery, showing us deserts and vast wind turbine fields. They employ elegant digital effects to enhance the film's scope, evoking *Godzilla* director Gareth Edwards' subtle work on his debut film *Monsters*.

Will the Ford Brothers expand their global gut-munching with a third film? With *The Dead 2*, they have proven that there is a wide world full of horror worth exploring.

SEAN PLUMMER

BANALITY OF EVIL

THE DEVIL INCARNATE

Starring Rod Luzzi, Graci Carli and Emily Rogers
Directed by L. Gustavo Cooper
Written by Jon Bosworth
Image Entertainment

Jeffrey Burton Russell once queried the tendency to reject belief in the Devil since the twentieth century had witnessed more evil – and claimed more victims – than all other centuries combined. *The Devil Incarnate*, the latest in a brood of pregnancy-themed camcorder shockers, clearly concurs with the eminent religious scholar's view that Satan and his denizens still maintain an active interest in harming humanity.



The targets here are newlyweds Trevor (Rod Luzzi) and Holly Davidson (Graci Carli), who visit an elderly psychic named Vjestica (Barbara Van Fleet) whilst on honeymoon. During the reading, Vjestica mysteriously explodes with rage, chasing them both out of her house. Shortly thereafter, Holly discovers she is pregnant and the couple retreats to their new home. As they prepare for the joyous arrival, Holly begins exhibiting increasingly strange and violent behaviour, which includes speaking in a foreign language and making sexual advances to Trevor's father (Tom Riska) and teenage sister Marissa (Emily Rogers).

After Holly slaughters the pet dog, Marissa convinces Trevor that something must have happened to his bride during their brief stop at Vjestica's house. Venturing back to the old woman's abode, the siblings learn that Holly is afflicted with an ancient curse that threatens to destroy her.

A procession of threadbare clichés that never cohere, *The Devil Incarnate* is a thematic trawl through well-trodden territory. Yoking together elements of *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Omen* and *Paranormal Activity*, director L. Gustavo Cooper seems more preoccupied with alternating between found footage and mumblecore aesthetics than crafting an engaging narrative. The film's atmosphere is at times eerily charged – particularly when the action is confined to the shadowy environs of the Davidson's home – but some nebulous photography and rough-hewn editing occasionally conspire to make a simplistic story difficult to follow.

Events culminate with a confusingly hurried climax, the cursory banality of which terminates any lingering vestige of plaintive dread we are expected to feel.

MICHAEL DOYLE

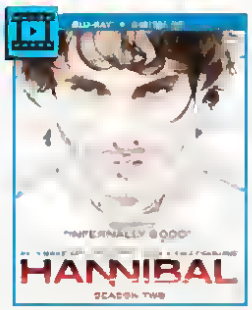
THE SECOND COURSE

HANNIBAL: SEASON TWO

Starring Mads Mikkelsen, Hugh Dancy and Laurence Fishburne
Directed by Various
Written by Various
Lionsgate

Seconds, please! Containing all thirteen episodes and a banquet of extras, *Hannibal: Season Two* is a juicy morsel seasoned with excellent acting and directing, sensual sound design and lush cinematography. Picking up from a slower season one, the story further develops the cat-and-mouse bromance between Dr. Hannibal Lecter (the incomparable Mads Mikkelsen) and FBI profiler and empath Will Graham (Hugh Dancy).

We begin with Will incarcerated in Dr. Chilton's asylum and Will's co-worker Beverly Katz (Hettienne Park) meeting an unfortunate fate. Will becomes ensconced in a very dark place and convinces the prison janitor/Chesapeake Ripper's copycat killer to murder Hannibal.



The intensity builds to a crescendo as Will enters the depths of Hannibal's world, morphing into a near mirror image of his "friend." Additional characters enter the picture, including Hannibal's own reluctant psychiatrist Dr. Bedelia du Maurier (Gillian Anderson), as well as the dysfunctional Verger twins, Margot (Katharine Isabelle) and Mason (Michael Pitt). Meanwhile, irritating reporter Freddie Lounds (Lara Jean Chorostecki) disappears, Will is put on trial, and the Ripper remains uncaught.

But it's not a full-on grim fest, puns about food and cannibalism, and jet black comedy seep through into the season. Even when Mason Verger eats his own face, it's both disgusting and hilarious.

As for the extras, *Season Two really* delivers. Sure there are the obligatory audio commentaries, deleted scenes, and a gag reel, but there are also a few in-depth featurettes on the jaw-dropping special effects, as well as on the process that goes into making a typical episode, in this case "Mukozuke." Fannibals will also be treated to an insider's look at how sound design, visual effects, and color correction are generated, and what informs these creative choices. There's an interesting behind-the-scenes look into the second season's pool scene, in which the copycat killer gets the best of Hannibal, as well as an exploration into the styling of the show's major characters. *Hannibal: Season Two* is a delicious dish indeed.

MICHELE GALGANA

KEEP IT IN THE CLOSET

THE DAMNED

Starring Peter Facinelli, Sophia Myles and Nathalia Ramos
Directed by Victor Garcia
Written by Richard D'Ovidio
IFC Midnight

Secrets take a terrible toll in *The Damned*, a generically titled but emotionally compelling film about a family torn apart by both evil and honesty. *Twilight* series star Peter Facinelli plays David, an American widower visiting his late wife's Colombian hometown with his fiancée Lauren (Sophia Myles, *Underworld*). He's there to retrieve his vacationing teenage daughter Jill (Nathalia Ramos), who has been staying with her reporter aunt, Gina (Carolina Guerra).



The group gets into trouble when flooding leaves them stranded in the hills outside Medellin. With Lauren wounded, they take shelter in an isolated hillside inn only after its elderly proprietor reluctantly allows them entry. The reason for the old man's reticence soon becomes apparent: he has a girl locked up in his cellar. The confused visitors release the child but live to regret their decision as the full weight of what they have done sinks in.

To say more about *The Damned*'s plot would be to spoil its modest surprises. You can probably deduce what happens next, but screenwriter Richard D'Ovidio (*The*

Call) imbues his characters with enough intelligence to make their choices and reactions believable. He also gives emotional weight to the story by focusing on the loving but tense relationship between David and Jill, imbuing the ending with a sadness and dread rarely felt in modern horror.

Credit too, to the actors for selling the story. Facinelli is the headliner due to his *Twilight* history, but the supporting players all turn in good work, especially Guerra, whose ambitious Gina gets to indulge a delicious dark side.

The Damned contains no revelations in terms of story or imagery (although there is one gore gag that is unexpectedly macabre and hilarious at the same time). Instead, it impresses by telling a simple, contained story well, with a small cast of dedicated actors. It also gives director Victor Garcia a chance to redeem himself for the abysmal *Hellraiser: Revelations*. Consider *The Damned* close enough to damned fine cinema.

SEAN PLUMMER

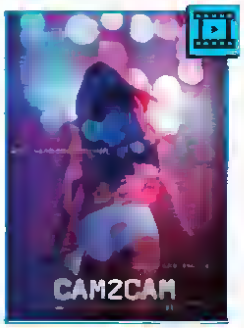
MALWARE

CAM2CAM

Starring Tammin Sursok, Sarah Bonrepaux and Ben Wiggins
Directed by Joel Soisson
Written by Marie Gautier and Davy Sihali
IFC

Cyber-thriller films are a troubled bunch. No matter how good the plots, they're always hurt by the use of soon to be antiquated tech (see *Lawnmower Man*), or by the insistence that the impossible can be achieved over the internet (see *The Net*). This dot-com horror aims its premise at the "dark underbelly" of the internet and tries to sidestep these shortcomings by focusing less on computers and more on telling a cautionary tale for world travellers. In doing so, it not only makes its cyber bits useless, it throws coherence out the, um – Windows.

The film opens on Lucy (Jade Taylor), a young woman alone in a run down Bangkok apartment who's engaging in a sexy webcam chat. She soon realizes something is awry when the lady on the other end is able to strip and type at the same time. When Lucy confronts her, she is threatened with emoticons and "LOLs." Next thing you know, her upstairs neighbour has come to the rescue, but unfortunately for Lucy, he turns out to be the e-harrasser and, after ordering her to strip while he films, he promptly murders her.



Three months later we join the sexy, all-American Allie (Tammin Sursok), who's just moved into Lucy's old place. She befriends the also-sexy Marit (Sarah Bonrepaux), who shows her local hot spots and introduces her to Cam2Cam, a website where she can get paid big bucks for taking off her clothes.

After an twist involving the killer and a bus, the remainder of the movie deals only briefly with the Cam2Cam website, turning the spotlight on Allie's investigation into the murder of Lucy. By the time the big reveal comes, however, so much time had been spent on inconsequential online elements that my attention span had timed out. More *Hostel* than *Hackers*, *Cam2Cam* deftly avoids embarrassing cyber-kitch, only to wallow in a poorly handled retread of horror flicks you've seen before.

PATRICK OOLAN



OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE REVELS IN THE REALITY OF ALIEN INVASION

I KINDA, SORTA WANT TO BELIEVE



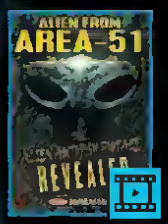
AMERICA'S ALIEN INVASION

Reality Films

Personal disclosure: I totally believe in UFOs. I also believe that we've been visited by aliens and a UFO crashed in Roswell, New Mexico in 1947. Also, I believe that my morning glass of milk comes from cats. Ahem. That's why I was excited to see this documentary that examines the "evidence" that purports to show that the US government has known about UFOs since the late 1800s and how the mainstream media and the Vatican are in on the cover-up. Though *America's Alien Invasion* plays loose with the "facts"' and uses enough stock footage to rival an Ed Wood matinee, it's still a sort-of unnerving look at what might happen if we were to learn the truth is that far out there. And that maybe Elvis shot JFK while wearing a Bigfoot costume.

ALIEN COUNT: 51
DEAD ALIEN COUNT: 9

CRAZY LIKE FOX



ALIEN FROM AREA-51

Reality Films

In 1995, Fox Television caused a commotion by televising what was supposed to be US military footage of an actual alien autopsy. Considered to be the Holy Grail by UFO-ologists, the hour-long special was titled *Alien Autopsy: Fact or Fiction?* and was hosted by *Star Trek: TNG*'s Jonathan Frakes. Though roundly dismissed as a fake, it did become the highest rated documentary on Fox. Unfortunately, this follow-up is a rather dry and prolonged interview with the two men who claimed to have found the film in the first place. The last twelve minutes contains the footage of the charred alien being autopsied by two doctors, and though it's grainy and blurry, if you listen closely you might be able to hear Fox executives giggling in the background.

ALIEN COUNT: 23
DEAD ALIEN COUNT: 1

BEAM ME UP, NESSIE!



ALIEN ENCOUNTER AT LOCH NESS

Reality Films

I know I said that I believed in aliens and UFOs, and I would've added that I believe in the Loch Ness monster too – it's just that I didn't think they were related. It's like saying dinosaurs built the pyramids. Most of this documentary plays out like a tourist video for an adventure ride at Scotland's infamous Loch Ness, complete with shaky "eye-witness accounts" of something in the water that might have been a plesiosaur or a giant catfish. Then, at the 50 minute mark, it goes full crazy by suggesting that old Nessie has actually been in communication with aliens and was beamed aboard one of their ships! Up next from Reality Films: *Santa Claus is a Yeti*.

ALIEN COUNT: 2
DEAD ALIEN COUNT: 0

LAST CHANCE LANCE



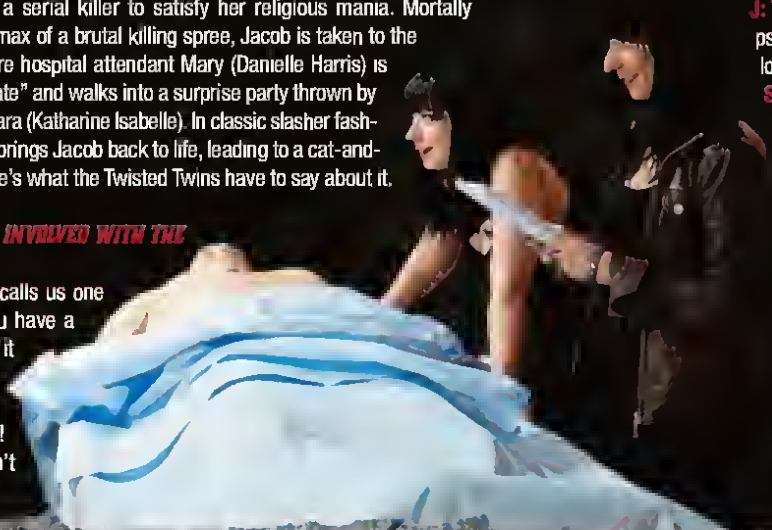
FOLLOWING UP ON THEIR BREAKTHROUGH FILM, **AMERICAN MARY**, THE SOSKA SISTERS GET SLASH-HAPPY FOR **SEE NO EVIL 2**

SAY GOODNIGHT!

BY PRESTON FASSEL

WITH A TALENT FOR CREATING AN AMBIANCE THAT RECAPTURES THE EXPERIENCE OF SEEING ONE'S FIRST HORROR FILM, WATCHING A SOSKA SISTERS PRODUCTION IS TO REMEMBER WHY ONE LOVES HORROR IN THE FIRST PLACE.

For Jen and Sylvia's latest, *See No Evil 2* (just released by Lionsgate), they eschew the tropes of modern fright cinema to deliver a fantastic, phantasmagoric ode to '80s horror, perfectly suited for Friday-night video fare. The film picks up where the 2006 original left off, continuing the story of Jacob Goodnight (Glenn "Kane" Jacobs), a traumatized recluse whose mother moulded him into a serial killer to satisfy her religious mania. Mortally wounded at the climax of a brutal killing spree, Jacob is taken to the local morgue, where hospital attendant Mary (Danielle Harris) is called in to "work late" and walks into a surprise party thrown by her best friend Tamara (Katharine Isabelle). In classic slasher fashion, booze and sex brings Jacob back to life, leading to a cat-and-mouse killfest. Here's what the Twisted Twins have to say about it.



HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH THE PROJECT?

Sylvia: Our agent calls us one day and says, "You have a script, can you read it right away?" And we're like, "Oh, it's a script emergency! Sure!" So we didn't read it. Then he calls again and he asks, "Did you read it yet?" And we're like, "Oh! It's a real script emergency!" So Jen and I open it and we see *See No Evil 2* and we're like, "We are fucking doing this!"

Jen: The script begins just as *See No Evil* ends, so we said, "Oh shit, this is *Halloween II*!" So if and when there's a *See No Evil III*, it's going to come right after this!

S: We want to make seven of them, so it's like [spending] one fucking crazy week with this guy!

HOW DOES JACOB GOODNIGHT FIT INTO THE SLASHER PANTHEON?

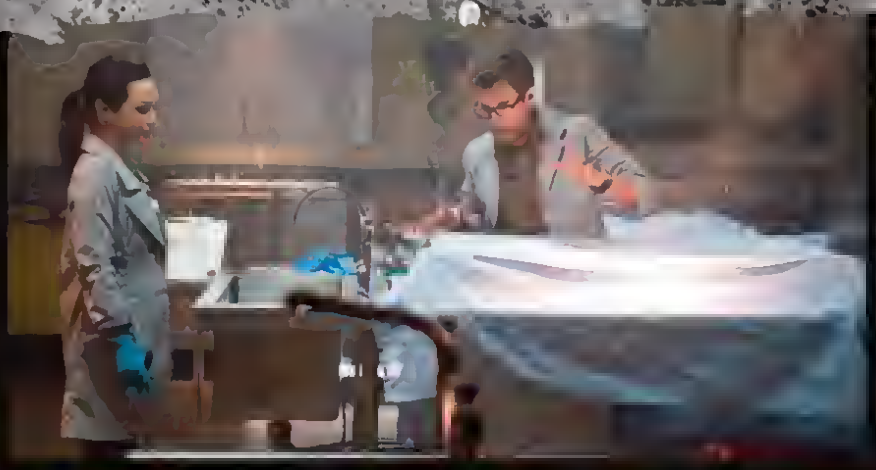
J: We tried to make him very human with real psychological issues. You don't get that with a lot of other horror icons.

S: He's a single guy out on the town. Unfortunately, he was never taught how to love. He's figuring out what his life is going to be.

J: There's no reason that Jacob can't be a Michael or Pinhead or Jason. You've got an actor with a built-in fanbase who's physically capable, as well as being a very talented actor.

TELL US ABOUT HIS LOOK.

J: One thing that people kept bringing up again and again was they wanted to see Jacob wear a mask. They wanted him to





Jacob's Fodder: *(left to right) Morgue workers Mary (Danielle Harris) and Seth (Kaj-Erik Eriksen), Tamara (Katharine Isabelle) breaks the slasher film rules and parties, and (opposite) directors Jen (right) and Sylvia Soska on set with Glenn "Kane" Jacobs.*

have a look. So the mask was the first thing that we went into. We wanted something that hasn't been done yet.

S: And it had to be something that you could find in a morgue.

J: And it had to be something that allowed you to see the actor's range of facial expressions. ... That was the challenge because people are coming to see Kane. I'm a Kane fan, and if you have a mask on him and you can't see his face, what's the point of even having Kane in the film?

THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT YOU'RE DIRECTING FROM SOMEONE ELSE'S SCRIPT. WHAT DID YOU DO TO BRING YOUR OWN TWIST TO IT?

J: I was very lucky that the WWE brought us in because they wanted our creative spin. There's a real feminist angle to it, and I think that horror is a place where there's a lot of really strong feminism because of the Final Girl character. And you watch *See No Evil 2* and you won't really know who the final girl is.

S: And Glenn Jacobs? I didn't know he was theatrically trained. He would come over and he'd say, "Well, we made Jacob up like this, so why don't we put in this..." And I say, "Yeah, fuck yeah, man! Let's do that!"

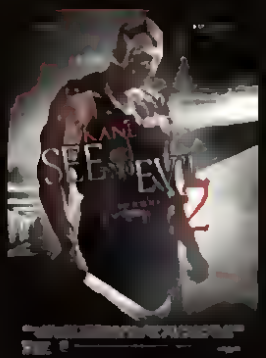
WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING WITH KATHARINE ISABELLE ON THIS, VERSUS AMERICAN MARY?

J: Horrible. She's always terrible. [Sylvia laughing] No, it was wonderful. Katie is such a talented actress. What happened to her recently with *American Mary* is the same thing that happened to her with *Ginger Snaps*. She was such a good Ginger that you saw her do so many other roles where she's this young fucking I-don't-give-a-shit-girl who smokes and has this really strong personality, but she can do so much more than that. And I think she's wonderful as Margot Verger on *Hannibal*. People think, "Dh, she needs to be this serious woman." Well, she is a serious woman. She's also a pissed off teenager, and she can also be a very self-aware, very sexually confident, hilarious character.

S: I know how chintzy that sounds, but, when the three of us come together, it's like coming home. We do things that push each other out of our comfort zones. I remember when I was telling Katie about the scene with her on top of Jacob Goodnight, and she said, "Are you fucking crazy?" And the thing is, whenever we ask someone to do something, we do it first, so Jen was there with the stand-in, doing the whole go on top of him thing, and Jen was like, "See, it's no big thing," and Katie's like, "That's because you guys don't mind showing your asses." I'm like, "Dh, come on Katie. We've seen it." I think those GIFs from the *American Mary* strip scene are, like, everywhere.

AND WHAT DID DANIELLE HARRIS BRING TO THE FILM?

J: You can talk filmmaker to her. You don't have to talk actor. If it wasn't for Danielle, I don't think we'd have been able to get away with what we did on *See No Evil*. ... There's a point when all the lights in the building go off, and the only lighting is by flashlights, and if the actor doesn't perfectly light the entire cast, I can't shoot it. And the actors aren't watching the frames, so you just have to describe, "I need you to put it behind you..."



S: Dh, Danielle is so fucking good at that.

J: She just got married and she was telling me she wants to start a family, but she's not going to do it until after she's done this movie. I ask why, and she says, "When I'm being chased by a murderer, and screaming, and seeing dead people, that is actually me, and that's how I experience it, and I don't want that to be the first few moments of my child's life!"

S: It was cool to have Danielle come in because she's been chased by murderers since she was a wee little girl, and she'd say, "Hey, I could get out of this, why wouldn't I do this or this?" And I'd be, like, "That's right! We need to change the script! We really need to fuck you over, so you can't do this or this!"

WHY MAKE A SEQUEL THIS MANY YEARS AFTER THE ORIGINAL?

S: I think a lot of it had to do with Michael [Luisi] coming in to WWE studios. They just released *Oculus*, and, I think he's just leading them in the right direction.

J: The original *See No Evil* was the first film that they ever did, so I think they weren't really in the groove of it yet. ... They were thinking more, "Can we do it?" rather than, "How can we do it?" And it was a three month shoot in Australia.

S: [it was also director] Gregory Dark's first non-porno film. I think that's why the insert shots were really good and the rest fell flat... that was a joke.

J: Some people loved *See No Evil*, and some people passionately disliked it. Which is fine with me because with all of our films, nobody is like, "I can take or leave *American Mary*." It's either, "I love *American Mary*, have you seen *American Mary*, go watch *American Mary*, I'm making you watch *American Mary*," or it's, "I fucking hate the Soskas, they're the worst kind of feminists, I hope they die in a plane crash, they're so ugly, I hate them."

S: I wish there was a middle ground sometimes.

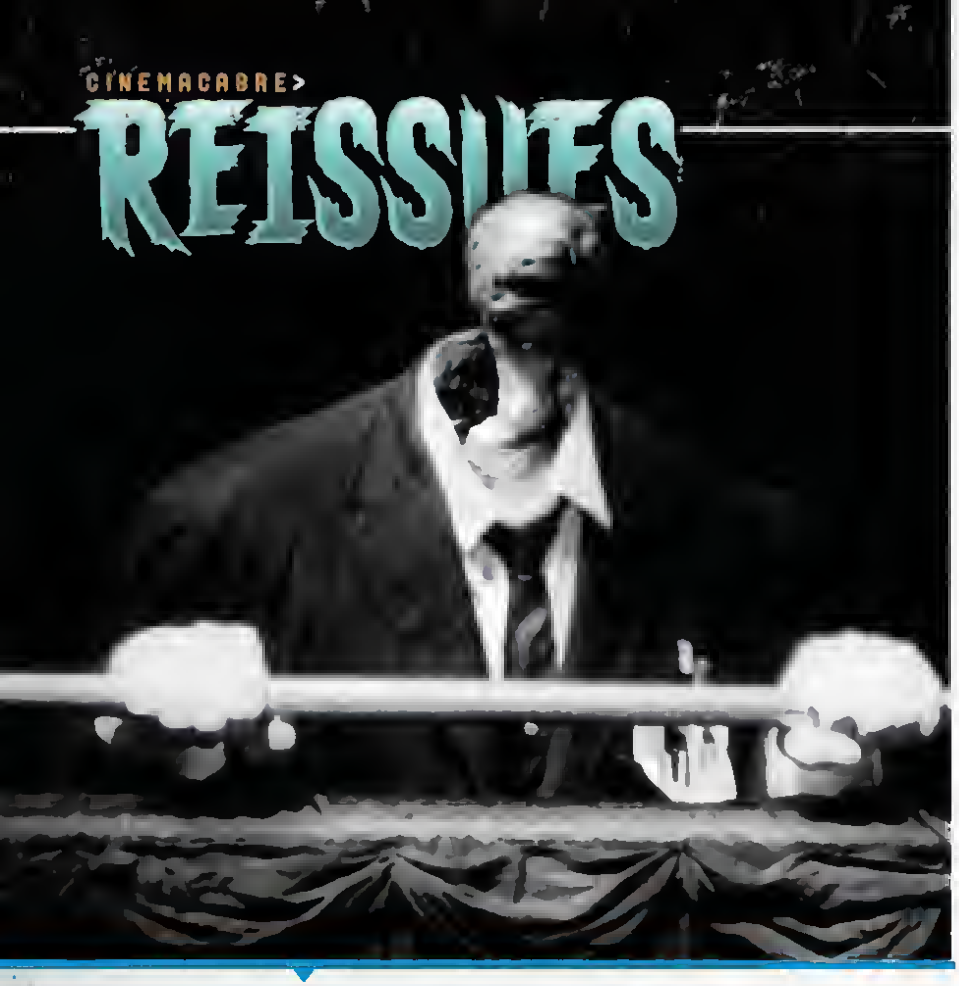
J: The middle ground is, "I haven't heard of the Soska Sisters yet." That's the middle ground.

WHAT ARE YOU TWO DOING TO MAKE SEE NO EVIL 2 UNIQUE, THEN?

J: It's a 1980s-style slasher film. It was made for true horror fans. The music is 1980s and Jacob has his own theme song, which is so important because you can't be a horror icon unless you have your own theme song.

S: It's just so much fucking fun! Maybe you won't learn anything, but you come out of there feeling awesomer and happier. ... And watch those girls. They're gonna put up a good fight. And those guys are gonna put up a good fight.

J: But they're fucked.

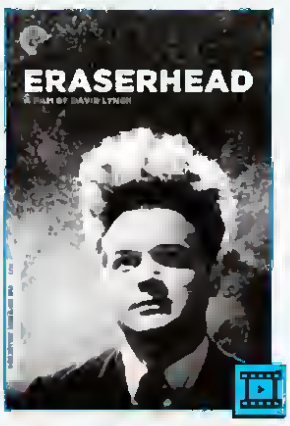


MONOCHROMATIC MONSTERPIECE

ERASERHEAD (1977) DVD/Blu-ray

Starring Jack Nance, Charlotte Stewart and Hal Landon Jr.
Written and directed by David Lynch
The Criterion Collection

Christmas came early this year, when the esteemed Criterion Collection trumped anything on its already impressive list of past miracles by releasing a 4K digital transfer of *Eraserhead*, David Lynch's seminal cult monsterpiece. The film burst onto the midnight movie circuit in the late '70s, seeming to have emerged from the inky pool of our most primordial anxieties. Full of organic phenomenon, half-glimpsed abominations, and deliciously nightmarish non sequiturs, Lynch's blackly comic masterwork succeeded in being unlike anything that had come before it.



A close approximation of the film's plot involves a painfully shy, vertically-coiffed oddball who learns that he and his mousy, faux-epileptic girlfriend have become parents to a shrieking, barely human infant that resembles a cow fetus crossed with a bowl of vanilla pudding. The story, however, takes a backseat to the never-ending array of surreally distressing images that wash over the screen in a nightmarish chiaroscuro of unidentifiable shadows and textures, which seem to exist in a barren, post-industrial wasteland rife with belching steam-grates and abandoned factories. The film appears to have been shot entirely on another planet. Funny, frightening, and ferociously original, *Eraserhead* is a worthy candidate for the most quintessential cult film of all time.

A pristine 4K transfer of this gem would be cause enough to celebrate, yet the always reliable Criterion Collection has seen fit to pack this bad boy with treats and treasures, including a collection of Lynch's early shorts, as well as his enigmatic 1995 piece *Premonitions Following an Evil Deed*, which was hand-cranked on the original Lumiere film camera.

In addition, the disc features an appropriately mysterious menu of dates ranging from 1977 to 2014, each year containing a different surprise tidbit – including a trailer, vintage footage and promotional material, an *Eraserhead* reunion (Lynch and his cohorts revisit their former shooting location), a montage of recent interviews with various cast and crew members and (most impressively) an 85-minute documentary in which Lynch quirkily recounts his memories of the film's grueling six-year production. And if that's not enough, the Criterion release also includes a gorgeous, photo-heavy booklet, featuring an in-depth interview with the charmingly cryptic director. It's enough to make your hair stand straight up.

JEREMY HOBBS

THE PRICE IS ALWAYS RIGHT

THE VINCENT PRICE COLLECTION VOLUME II (1959 – 1972) Blu-ray

Starring Vincent Price, Elizabeth Shepherd and Brett Halsey
Shout! Factory

Just like last year's hefty Blu-ray set of Vincent Price classics, Shout! Factory has lined up another impressive release of seven (count 'em) Price-starring chillers. Not only does *The Vincent Price Collection Volume II* feature Price's essential Roger Corman pics *The Raven* and *The Tomb of Ligeia*, but also William Castle's creaky *House on Haunted Hill*, *The Last Man on Earth* (based on a Richard Matheson novel), and the all-star horror farce *The Comedy of Terrors*. Rounding out the release are spooky sequels *Dr. Phibes Rises Again* and *The Return of the Fly*, all beautifully remastered in editions much improved from their earlier DVD releases.



Shout! Factory has also included a handful of new material, including commentaries by film historians Constantine Nasr, Steve Haberman and David Del Valle. These chats are informative, but most viewers will likely be itching to check out new commentaries by *The Tomb of Ligeia* actress Elizabeth Shepherd and *The Return of the Fly*'s star man-insect hybrid Brett Halsey on their respective films as they discuss working with Price and provide perspective on their own experiences on the productions.

Matheson is a name that pops up a lot on the release, having scripted almost half of these films, and fans of the esteemed author should be glad that the "Richard Matheson Storyteller" interviews originally included in MGM's Midnite Movie releases have been preserved on this set, not to mention the related interviews and commentary tracks with frequent collaborator Roger Corman. Likewise, you can ditch some of your old discs since featurettes such as "Vincent Price: Renaissance Man," "The Art of Fear," and "Working with Vincent Price," which previously appeared on the *Vincent Price · MGM Scream Legends Collection*, are out in full force.

One of the best discoveries on Shout! Factory's new collections are little framing segments for many of the films created by PBS in the early 1980s for broadcast. In these short, videotaped

spots, an aging Price appears to talk a bit about what audiences are in store for. The set includes an interview with a PBS exec about these segments, which also appeared on the first Price release.

Although perhaps not quite as exciting a lineup as last year's six-film first volume, *The Vincent Price Collection Volume II* is a wonderful companion for that earlier set, giving us another hefty dose of the Merchant of Menace in some of his more memorable roles, while still saving enough treats for what will hopefully be a third and final set next year. It's an absolute must-own for fans of classic horror – at any... Price.

PAUL CORUPE

MIDIAN COOL

NIGHTBREED: THE DIRECTOR'S CUT Blu-ray

Starring Craig Sheffer, David Cronenberg and Anne Bobby
Written and directed by Clive Barker
Scream Factory

When Clive Barker's *Hellraiser* turned out to be a certifiable classic, it looked like a new *ubermensch* had arrived on the scene, ready to take over not only the world of horror fiction but horror cinema, as well. Then, just as quickly as he'd arrived, he departed. It isn't difficult to see why: 1990's *Nightbreed* had "incomplete" stamped all over it, an assessment with which Barker himself would heartily agree. After creating an epic paean to monster lore, clueless executives demanded reshoots and edits before marketing it as a grade-Z slasher. While we'll never know what Barker would have produced had his Hollywood experience been more positive, we can at least get an idea thanks to *Nightbreed: The Director's Cut*, out from Scream Factory.

Aaron Boone (Craig Sheffer) is having a difficult year: not only has he just found out that he's a monster (of the literal, blood-drinking variety), he's also been framed for murder by his serial-killer psychiatrist, a lunatic named Decker (David Cronenberg) with a penchant for wiping out entire families. On the run, Boone learns of Midian, a mythic city that harbors monsters against the persecutions of "normal" society. Although he initially finds solace there, Boone is drawn away from his new home by the arrival of not only a vengeful Decker, but also his girlfriend, Lori (Anne Bobby), his one remaining link to humanity.

Scream's DVD contains anything and everything related to the film's production, including a brand new commentary from Barker and a 72-minute making-of documentary. For the true completionist, though, Scream is offering a special edition three-disc set available only from their website; that gem contains deleted scenes, concept art, and previously-thought-lost footage of stop motion tests, plus a newly restored version of the original theatrical cut. The real special feature, of course, is the film itself, which runs twenty-minutes longer, including 40 minutes of never-before seen footage.




Nightbreed

Although the high-concept nature of the original is still on display (Boone's journey can easily be read as an allegory for the LGBT experience, religious persecution, and even the experience of being a horror fan), Barker himself – who oversaw the restoration – is most proud to summate the film in a unique way: it's a love story. It's a love story about monsters and mayhem, a love story between two lost souls wandering in the night, and, lastly, a love letter to anyone who's ever settled into a theater seat to lose themselves in the world of horror.

PRESTON FASSEL

SATAN KLAUS

PRINCE OF THE NIGHT (1988) DVD

Starring Christopher Plummer, Donald Pleasence and Klaus Kinski
Directed by Augusto Caminito, Luigi Cozzi, et. al
Written by Alberto Alfieri, Augusto Caminito and Leandro Lucchetti
One 7 Movies

In the Shit Show Hall of Fame, there's surely an entire wing dedicated to Klaus Kinski. The late German actor is best known for his five collaborations with legendary auteur Werner Herzog, yet almost as famous for his abusive, erratic and violent behaviour behind the scenes. His reputation precedes him in *Prince of the Night* (a.k.a. *Nosferatu in Venice*, *Vampire in Venice*); the DVD cover describes how producer Augusto Caminito (*Murder Rock*) ended up behind the camera (with a hand from *Contamination* director Luigi Cozzi) after burning through several directors.

The result is expectedly messy, with some awkardly constructed scenes and gooty editing choices, though an overall atmosphere of Gothic dread helps somewhat (thank cinematographer Tonino Nardi for his beautifully hazy cityscapes in Venice). *Prince of the Night* borrows heavily from Herzog's *Nosferatu*, made nearly a decade earlier and also starring Kinski as the titular vampire, and, according to the IMDb, the actor was supposed to reprise his role but refused to go through the extensive makeup. So instead he occasionally sports the rodent-like teeth and walks around most of the time like his usual scraggly self, which works to humanize his monstrous behaviour when he kills members of the clergy and ravages women (he assaulted them for real, apparently).



The plot is expectedly confusing and scattershot and features Christopher Plummer as a professor who travels to Venice to uncover the bloodsucker legend. With the help of Helietta Canins (Barbara De Rossi), he locates a crypt under her family home. (There are various other characters and subplots involving romances, the family's cursed history and the plague, which are occasionally relevant.) Donald Pleasence stands out in the mess as a ranting priest.

Put Luigi Ceccarelli's sometimes cool, sometimes intrusive, score of '80s synth and classical music on top of it all, sprinkle on some terrible special effects and few unique twists on the vampire myth (the use of doppelgangers makes for some great moments) and you've got a sort-of unintentional art-horror film. *Prince of the Night* may be more of a curiosity than anything, but this stake in Klaski's career is certainly unparalleled.

DAVE ALEXANDER



1980s SCHOOL KILLER CLASSICS PROM NIGHT AND GRADUATION DAY GET ACCEPTED ONTO BLU-RAY

CUTTING CLASSES

BY PAUL CORUPE

HAVING THAT HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA IN HAND MAY MAKE SOME WANT TO CELEBRATE, BUT IT CAN ALSO BE A VULNERABLE, SCARY TIME AS TEENS ARE FACED WITH IMPORTANT CHOICES THAT WILL AFFECT THE REST OF THEIR LIVES.

Little surprise that slasher filmmakers, usually content to set machete-wielding killers loose on national holidays, soon turned their attention to this important cultural milestone as another opportunity for bloodshed. Two favourite 1980s graduating class classics, *Prom Night* (1980) and *Graduation Day* (1981), have now hit Blu-ray to help put a little fear in the hearts of valedictorians everywhere.

That's not to say that the Canadian-lensed *Prom Night* is a particularly frightening film, unless you happen to be afflicted with a crippling fear of disco lights, custom vans or pantsuits. This light-hearted effort isn't terribly successful as it tries to build up a few thrills in its whodunit slasher plot, but it's still a lot of fun as it follows siblings Kim (Jamie Lee Curtis) and Alex (Michael Tough) while they prep for prom. Kim and her friends are worried about the usual teen preoccupations like getting a date and looking their best, but Kim should be concerned about Wendy (Anne-Marie Martin), who plans to steal away her boyfriend, Nick (Casey Stephens), and embarrass her rival on the big night. Things take a turn for the strange when some of the students receive mysterious, whispered phone calls about their sworn-to-secrecy role in the accidental death of a young girl six years earlier. With red herrings appearing in every direction, only one thing is for sure: the upcoming disco-themed prom is going to be a night that no one will ever forget.



Carrie is the obvious reference point for director Paul Lynch's sometimes-plodding slasher film. Granted, technically, *Prom Night* is a little rough around the edges, but it's likable thanks to a few FX surprises and an interesting cast, including not only *Halloween* queen Curtis, but also Leslie Nielsen, who gets to boogie down with his onscreen daughter Kim in an extended disco sequence. Enjoy that glitter in a sparkling new restoration, thanks to Synapse Films.

At least *Prom Night* actually makes use of its school setting, a lesson that *Graduation Day* should have taken more to heart. However, though most of the kills curiously take place in a forested park rather than locker-lined halls, the film is actually a tighter and more effective work than its Canadian cousin, featuring some effective editing tricks and a steadier hand behind the camera from director Herb Freed.

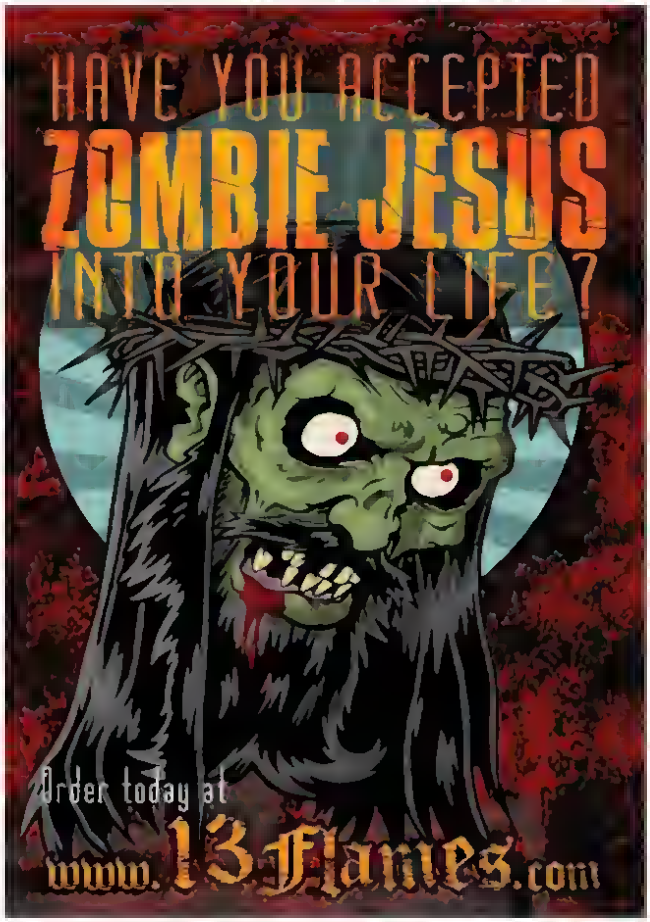
Another slasher, another killing to be avenged by a mysterious figure – the student body is in shock when track star Laura (Ruth Ann Llorens) collapses during a race and dies. Some blame her high school coach (Christopher George) for pushing her too hard, including her sister, Anne (Patch Mackenzie), an inscrutable Navy officer back in town for the funeral. Particularly upset is Laura's boyfriend, Kevin (E. Danny Murphy), who tells Anne that he had plans to marry her sister after the upcoming graduation ceremony. Police inspector Halliday (Carmen Argenziano) finally stops by after five students go missing, but the school principal (Michael Pataki) insists there's nothing unusual about that. Frequent cutaways to a photograph of the track team with Xs drawn over the faces of the teen victims tell the real story, as the unknown killer targets Laura's classmates, which include Dolores (Linnea Quigley) and Doris (famed game show letter-turner Vanna White).



This mostly enjoyable effort, originally a Troma release that's been cleaned up for Blu-ray by Vinegar Syndrome, has some interesting, if crudely executed, gags involving a spike-laden high jump mat and the ol' fencing foil in a football trick. Less exciting is the extraordinary lengths *Graduation Day* goes to in an effort to set up potential suspects; it seems like everyone's packing dark gloves, knives and stopwatches!

But even a passing grade is enough for most slashers, and these are both flawed but fun entries that sometimes seem more interested in high school hijinks and era-appropriate music than horror atmospherics. *Prom Night* or *Graduation Day* may not have finished at the head of their class, but you'll still want to vote them in as the most likely to find their way into your slasher DVD collection.


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THE LATE-NITE ARCHIVE

FILE: No Vacancies

by Paul Corupe



The French have been known to refer to an orgasm as a "little death" but, when looking at horror movies, it may be more appropriate to say that death can be a little orgasm. The history of sex and horror has long been intertwined, from Dracula's deadly charisma and murderous manifestations of sexual repression movies to the slasher morality plays of the 1980s. Ultimately, horror films often use a moment or two of violence to stand in for the physical act itself, partially because North American film censors have long preferred any acts of onscreen penetration to involve a knife rather than flesh. But few films exploit horror cinema's sexual stand-in as readily and overtly as Fernando Di Leo's *Slaughter Hotel*, a notably sleazy 1971 giallo about a black-gloved killer attacking female patients with more phallic weapons than you can shake a very suggestive stick at.

RaRD Video has done an impressive job in the past few years releasing Di Leo's other Euro-genre titles, including his tongue-in-cheek crime flicks, but their new Blu-ray release of this proto-slasher reveals that this film represents a notable shift away from the humour and playfulness he often relied on.



Maybe a sanatorium for unstable women isn't the best place to house a museum-like exhibit of deadly medieval weapons, but who am I to judge? Dr. Keller (a bored Klaus Kinski) runs a private institution where he treats his all-female patients in a posh, Gothic atmosphere that just happens to be stocked with maces, axes, crossbows and even an iron maiden. Behind the scenes, sexual tensions reach the breaking point when Anne (Rosalba Neri), a confirmed nymphomaniac, is admitted to the hospital. Even worse, a dark figure decked out in a hooded cape starts prowling the halls, spying on the patients' soft-core sexual activities, including masturbation and lesbian trysts. By the time Di Leo manages to pry his camera away from leering shots of female bodies to splash a little blood on those antique weapons, the expected set of possible suspects emerges, including the scythe-wielding gardener (John Ely), Dr. Osterman (John Karlsen) and the creepy Dr. Keller himself.

Though horror cinema has been shaped by erotic underpinnings, most of these films are more subtle when they explore the connection between sex and death by planting subconscious seeds, using metaphors and ambiguous suggestions. *Slaughter Hotel* doesn't have time for any of that, emphasizing the sexual nature of the relationship between killer and female victim in a blatant, distinctly uncomfortable way.

Much of the film involves voyeuristic, almost POV shots of Euro-starlets writhing around on their beds and giving each other sponge baths. But the scenes that comingle sex and death are the film's most effective elements. The killer, often hiding in the shadows, breathes heavily as he watches the sleeping girls, preparing to strike. In one curious scene, he gives a dozing victim a ceremonial dagger and, when she awakes and raises it to attack, he pushes her back on the bed with his hands around her neck and slices off her panties. Not long after, a nude Anne invites the killer into her bed – actually pleading with him to join her – only to get an axe in her neck for the trouble, the dark figure panting suggestively as he delivers death blows. Later, standing near a window, fresh from an encounter with her nurse, Mara (Jane Garret) is shot through the neck with a crossbow arrow in the film's most unashamedly phallic attack.

As it revels in its fetishization of sexual violence without pretense, *Slaughter Hotel* provokes feelings of distinct uneasiness as viewers see a parade of nude women meet a violent end. Di Leo most likely intended these scenes to titillate, but the removal of all subtlety forces viewers to consider the issues of sex and death and how they relate to each other in a way that most other films leave behind a veil of Freudian theory and symbolism. It may not be particularly elegant or artful, but *Slaughter Hotel* wants to communicate its ideas with the potency of orgasmic violence, and isn't afraid to bludgeon you with them.



IT CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT

R DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

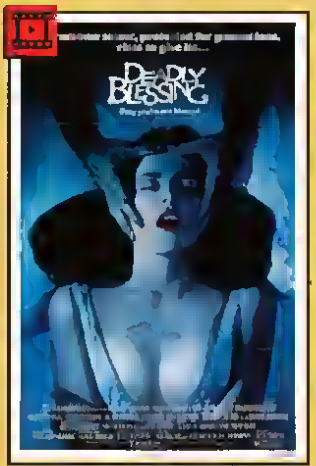
Do You Know What I Did Last Summer?

by John W. Bowen



Hi I'm back. I'll not deluge you with details of the near-death experience that sidelined me in recent months; suffice to say I'm mostly recovered, and I'm delighted that no one committed the grievous sin of cleaning this place in my absence. The mess and mildew have welcomed me like an old friend, and my treasured collection of laminated restraining orders from Angela Bettis remains unmolested.

For my first column back, I bring you a discovery – make that a rediscovery – I made during this wretched summer. Maybe it's because I think of *Deadly Blessing* (1981) as the dark horse among Wes Craven's early(ish) ouvre, or maybe because I watched it on YouTube with Greek subtitles while lying in a hospital bed one *dark and stormy night* in August. Whatever the case, it's filled to brimmin' with many of Craven's trademark preoccupations: family strife, culture clashes, class warfare, a dash of religious fanaticism and strong, resourceful women who (mostly) manage to hold it together in the face of serious weirdness. And by "serious weirdness" I don't just mean supporting actor Michael Berryman. In fact, that's a pretty good descriptor for the plot itself, which is a far cry from anything else offered in the slasher-obsessed early 1980s, which may explain its lack of a larger following. "Ungainly fucking mess" is also a pretty fair assessment, but don't let that put you off – in spite of its inconsistencies, *Deadly Blessing* is an intriguing, unpredictable mash up of terror tropes old and new with a very solid cast.



Martha and Jim Schmidt (Maren Jensen and Douglas Barr) live on a farm neighbouring a colony of Hittites, an ultra-puritanical bunch who, according to one character, "make the Amish look like swingers." Unlike the famously peace-loving Amish, however, these bearded and bonneted nut-jobs despise outsiders and aren't above harassing or even smiting any unfortunate infidels who get too close, all in the name of keeping things pure and godly-like. The complication: Jim Schmidt is a lapsed Hittite who left, got a college degree and married wretched unbeliever Martha, provoking the wrath of community patriarch Isaiah (Ernest Borgnine in full glorious bluster) and his followers.

The faithful are also less than keen on their other neighbours, a free-spirited mother and daughter (Lois Nettleton and Lisa Hartman). Tensions get ratcheted up a few more notches when Jim is killed in a highly suspect tractor mishap, and even further when grieving Martha invites her hot college friends Vicky and Lana (Susan Buckner and a then-unknown Sharon Stone), to come for an extended stay. Soon enough, Vicky turns the head of another young Hittite (Jeff East), who eventually strays from both the sect and his fiancée (Colleen Riley) to pursue his new-found dream girl (Borgnine makes plain his displeasure with this particular development. "You are a stench in the nostrils of God!" It's now my ambition to someday put a similar hurtin' on Jehovah's nose myself.) Hittite harassment continues to escalate with each new sacrilege, although exactly who – or how many – of the faithful are responsible remains largely unclear until the epic catfight at the film's climax, and even then we're left with more than a few loose ends. Confused yet? If not, you haven't been paying attention.

If all of the above sounds like a righteous condemnation of patriarchy and bigotry to you, you'd be correct. But Craven is careful to provide glimpses of the antagonists' side of the story – much as he did in *The Hills Have Eyes* – so we can at least understand their motivations without necessarily condoning their behaviour. Of course, none of this would amount to a pound of prairie dog poo if Craven didn't foster such genuinely creepy atmosphere and some serious jump-jolts, even if they don't always make a whole bunch of sense. Several years back, *Deadly Blessing* got a proper, extras-enriched reissue in the UK from Wizard Video – with new cover art by our own beloved Ghoulish Gary Pullin – and then Scream Factory followed suit with a Blu-ray release in North America. So what are you waiting for?

In closing, I'd be remiss if I didn't heap gratuitous gratitude on Dave Alexander, Tal Zimerman, April Snellings and Last Chance Lance for doing such kick-ass guest spots in my absence. Know what else they did? Like all good guests, they got the hell out of my basement when they were done, and I'd appreciate it if you'd all do the same right now. But come back soon, 'cause truth be told, I've actually kind of missed you all... just a little.

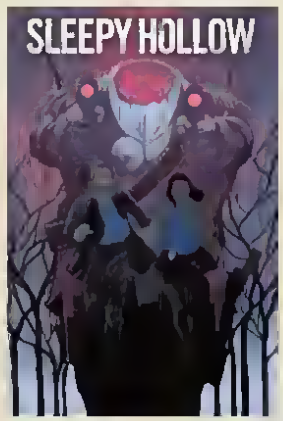
BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

Fox's *Sleepy Hollow* proved to be a surprise hit when it debuted on television last fall. A reimagining of Washington Irving's classic tale, the series documents the adventures of Ichabod Crane, a Revolutionary War soldier who finds himself transported in time to present-day Sleepy Hollow, where he befriends policewoman Abbie Mills. Their mission: to prevent Armageddon, heralded by the notorious Headless Horseman who just happens to be one of the fabled Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. With its combination of humour, adventure, romance, mystery and out-and-out horror, the show has quickly garnered a legion of devoted fans who label themselves "Sleepy Heads."

And now, Sleepy Heads have even more reason to rejoice. The series' success has given rise to its very own comic from BOOM!, which starts off with an initial four-issue miniseries. Written by Marguerite Bennett (*Batman: Joker's Daughter*) and drawn by Jorge Coelho (*Polarity*), the book nicely complements its live-action counterpart, due in no small part to Bennett's love of the show; in fact, it was her enthusiasm for the program that led to the creation of the comic in the first place.

"I'm a huge, vocal fan of the show, and have geeked out hard on Twitter and Tumblr and in my social and professional circles," she admits. "I was lucky enough to share this fangirl love with Dafna Pleban, an editor at BOOM!, with whom I'd discussed fan theories and hopes for the show. Our enthusiasm led to the pitch, and I was over the moon when it was selected by the writers of the TV show."



One of the reasons the book received the program's blessing is undoubtedly because her story meshes perfectly with the show's ongoing narrative, without disrupting the larger story arc. In the opening chapter, Crane and Mills investigate a series of what appear to be minor miracles throughout the town. A blind woman can suddenly see, while a young girl saves her brother from near-fatal car crash by inexplicably manifesting super powers. The joy is short-lived, however, as the subjects begin to transform into grotesque and deadly creatures with an aim to convert others into monstrosities.

One of the biggest challenges when producing a comic based on live-action media is working within the established mythology in order to please existing fans, while at the same time making the work appealing to those unfamiliar with the source material. Fans can rest assured that Bennett has effortlessly translated the strong friendship between Crane and Mills, complete with their trademark witty banter, from screen to print.

And of course a big draw for horror fans has been the slew of monsters popping up on the small screen every week. Ghosts, witches, demons and the Headless Horseman himself, have cut (pun intended) a path to viewers' hearts. The comic aims to follow in those footsteps, and Bennett is quick to point out the one area she's most excited about exploring.

"Body horror! I love body horror," she says. "I'm usually more of a monster girl, but for these stories, we've got a nice helping of psychological torture and emotional vivisection, while we're at it. I'm such a fan of the dark/charming/campy/shocking aesthetic of the program, though of course, in comics, we've got essentially unlimited special effects. So we get a little... outlandish, at times."

Luckily, she found the right artist to get outlandish with. Coelho does a fantastic job of making the afflicted characters look benign one moment and repulsive the next, as they undergo their terrifying transformations. He stays within the visual guidelines established by the program but also draws on his own experiences and love of the genre to give the book its own unique look.

"I'm very inspired by horror, fantasy, and supernatural themes in general," says Coelho. "The TV series is visually very interesting, so I took that inspiration, added my own input, and mixed and matched it into something that, hopefully, is a little different but shares a common ground within the universe."



Sleepy Hollow *brings the Headless Horseman legend into the 21st Century*

Though the initial series consists of four issues, Bennett looks forward to working on the property into the future and already has a few ideas for more stories.

"I would love to get into some of the weirder history," she reveals, "especially women's history in the colonial era and into the beliefs about good and evil in the different cultures that were combatants during the American Revolution."

Sleepy Hollow is rolling onto shelves right now!

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QUICK CUTS

REVIEWS BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

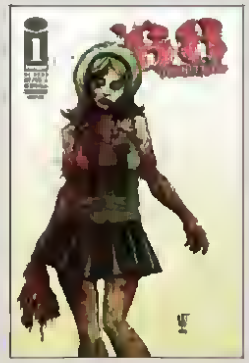


The second arc of *Empire of the Dead* begins with a casual check-in on the major players introduced in the initial act. Penny Jones, scientist and would-be zombie tamer; Mayor Chandrake, ruler of New York City and head of a secret cabal of vampires; Melody, the survivor of a vampire attack; a band of Southern rebels looking to overtake NY, and Xavier, a female zombie who has managed to ignore her baser, undead instincts and has taken a young girl, Jo, under her wing. There's little gore on display here. Instead, we're given solid character work and a look into character dynamics on par with the best of Romero's films, and Dalibor Talajic's art is compelling enough that – despite the lack of action -- the visuals hold the reader's interest. There's a strong sense that the players are being positioned for a big payoff, so it was a smart move on Romero's part to open slowly and give the reader time to invest in the characters before the mayhem begins.

Dark Horse's *Fire and Stone* saga unites the *Prometheus*/*Alien*/*Predator* worlds under one epic umbrella storyline. The *Alien* portion of the comic story begins, intriguingly, during the second *Alien* film. A portion of the colonists on LV-426 escape to the neighbouring LV-223 (not coincidentally, the planet seen in the *Prometheus* movie), shortly before Ripley and her gang of gung-ho marines touch down. Unfortunately for the survivors, xenomorph stowaways launch a deadly attack soon after landing. If you're familiar with the *Alien* franchise, nothing here will come as a huge shock. Small-group-terrorized-by-aliens pretty much sums up every entry, whether in print or on film. In addition, the characters are ill-defined, and while Patric Reynold's art is good, it doesn't bring anything new to the table. Even the scenes of carnage fail to distinguish themselves from their predecessors. Tying into *Prometheus* – and *Predator* – might make the final tale stand out, but for now, the first issue offers very little that *Alien* fans haven't seen before.



The first few *'68* series have taken place primarily in the jungles of Vietnam, as American soldiers fight back zombie hordes while trying to escape back to the US. But, as *Homefront* proves, America has not been immune to the living dead problem. We meet a small group of teens in rural Pennsylvania, as well as the local undertaker who's experiencing some unexpected hazards of the trade with the recently resurrected. These scenes are more successful than those featuring the youths, who fall firmly within type: the nice girl, the brainy girl, the slutty girl and the bad boy. Judging by the last page, however, their story is about to kick into overdrive, so hopefully, more interesting characterization is on the way. Plus, Kyle Charles' art makes up for the lack of compelling characters, especially during the mortuary zombie attack. The change of locale from the warring jungle is a welcome one, yet it also robs *'68* of much of its uniqueness. Still, this is a good, old-fashioned zombie romp that will entertain.





Cal McDonald is having a rough time. Tired of the death and destruction surrounding his never-ending battles with the forces of evil – not to mention being turned into a ghoul himself – he begins to question his very existence and purpose. Unfortunately, he doesn't have much time for soul-searching as a new threat has manifested itself in the form of a baby demon that feeds on hatred and violence. There are some strong introspective moments for our hero here, which will hopefully be built up later in the series. Christopher Mitten creates some disturbing imagery with regards to the baby demon. Resembling a foetus more than a fully developed child, it floats in the air, latching onto unsuspecting victims to suck their life essence and/or force them to commit wanton acts of destruction. As if that weren't trouble enough, *The Third Child*'s climax hints at the return of an old villain, nicely upping the already-high stakes.

Pirouette is a fifteen year-old girl who performs as an acrobatic clown in a travelling circus. Abused and humiliated by her parents and colleagues, her head is filled with dark, psychotic visions, as well as dreams of a better life. But things are about to change, as the next stop on the circus' route may hold some startling answers to her real heritage. Will Pirouette's dream come true, or is a nightmare about to begin? Carlos Granda has taken full advantage of the freak show setting, stuffing the book with grotesque caricatures and repulsive sequences, such as Pirouette slicing her face off in a daydream. Mark L. Miller's script goes a bit overboard stressing how horrible our teen clown's life is, though we do sympathize with her enough by the end of *Pirouette #1* to care how the story unfolds.



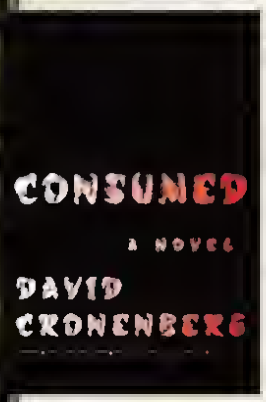




THE NINTH CIRCLE BOOKS

CONSUMED
David Cronenberg
Hamish Hamilton

When David Cronenberg stopped making horror movies, the genre lost a unique voice and a visionary when it came to the topics of transgressive sex and squicky body horror. Since then, no one has taken up the director's commitment to making audiences feel so uncomfortable in their skin. If you miss his style of horror, there's good news for you: his first novel, *Consumed*, is classic Cronenberg.



In it, he focuses on a pair of journalists and lovers, Nathan and Naomi, who specialize in strange and sensational stories. Naomi has found a juicy lead: philosopher Aristide Arosteguy has fled France under suspicion of murdering and eating his wife Célestine. Naomi chases him to Japan, seeking at least an interview – but she's ready in case things get messier.

Nathan, on the other hand, contracts an STD (that was eradicated long ago) from the patient of a dodgy doctor who performs experimental surgeries at a makeshift clinic in Budapest. Convinced that the reemergence of the STD is his next story, Nathan heads to Canada to consult the doctor who discovered the disease, finding an odd family with strange connections to Naomi's work. As their discoveries and research intertwine and mirror each other, Naomi and Nathan stumble onto a global cabal of intellectuals, hedonists, technophiles, and radicals whose connections are mysterious and deep.

Cronenberg's distinctive obsessions and approach to character and story make it easy to imagine *Consumed* as a film or TV series. But while his filmmaking prowess is unquestioned, as a prose writer Cronenberg falters with unwieldy, thudding sentences. Nevertheless, his first novel is still able to propel readers through risky sex, body-altering technology, meditations on many forms of consumption, and grisly performance art.

Even so, *Consumed* has other flaws. Major characters disappear with only a few sentences explaining their fates, and the novel ends on a ponderously ambiguous note. Taken on its own, it reads like the work of an accomplished, mature artist tackling a new medium for the first time; it's awkward but thrilling, detached yet stomach-turning (don't read it while eating). As a return to the horror only David Cronenberg can produce, however, it's essential.

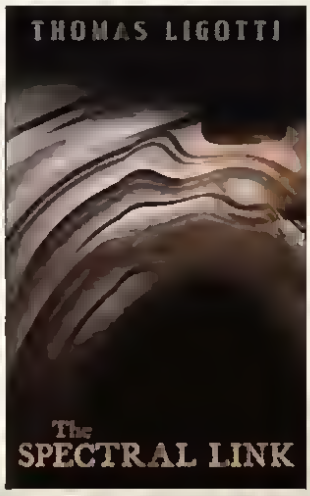
SAM COSTELLO

THE SPECTRAL LINK
Thomas Ligotti
Subterranean Press

Ten years after Ligotti's last book comes this all-too-slim volume of his new fiction. Writer's block and a serious medical condition prevented a larger body of work, and the scarcity of this author's tales makes *The Spectral Link* a real treasure to be cherished.

The stars are right, seeing as a tribute to Ligotti, *The Grimscribe's Puppets* (*RM#137*), just won a Stoker Award for best anthology, and *True Detective* brought his name to the masses through obvious inspiration derived from his non-fiction book *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race* (2010).

The Spectral Link demonstrates that, for Ligotti, pain, death and the horror of existence are not genre tropes but a reality he has to cope with through his fiction. This volume consists of two novellas: *Metaphysica Morum* (which the author calls "autobiography exaggerated") and *The Small People*. The first deals with a character "overwhelmed by an uncanny dread," haunted by incessant lucid nightmares and a strong death wish, in spite of sessions with a (questionable) doctor. Amid passionate monologues about nonexistence, we find horrific hints about a mysterious "Dealer" and the narrator's cousin who can draw people into his own dreams. There is also a surprisingly hilarious excerpt from a letter by "a degenerate swamp dweller," which contains all imaginable jokes about inbred cannibalistic backwater rednecks.



The Small People is slightly more conventional in that it has more plot: a boy finds himself "on the wrong side of reality" when he uncovers a society of living dolls "subsisting, even thriving, on the brink of nonexistence." Dolls and puppets are a staple of Ligotti's fiction because they are, just like humans, "all appearance and no substance" – no wonder, then, that this story does something unique with them.

The grimness of this prose is undeniably honest, but is alleviated by black humour and Ligotti's trademark vivid, witty turns of phrase, which make the bleakness funny and absurd. And if you just can't get enough of this author's nihilism, try *Born To Fear*, a brand new book of interviews with Ligotti, edited by Matt Cardin, also by Subterranean.

DEJAN DGNJANDVIĆ

THE OUTER LIMITS AT 50
David J. Schow with Ted C. Rypel
Creature Features

Though (arguably) a qualitative equal to its forerunner *The Twilight Zone*, *The Outer Limits* has been unfairly relegated to also-ran status as a runner-up to Rod Serling's groundbreaking fantasy series. Yet despite a comparatively small run of episodes – 49 to be exact, amounting to a small percentage of *Zone*'s five-year run – and a truncated second season that was hobbled both creatively and fiscally, *The Outer Limits* has made just as indelible an impact on the genre TV scene as the show it is most often compared to, and its influence continues to resonate in entertainment a half century after its airing.

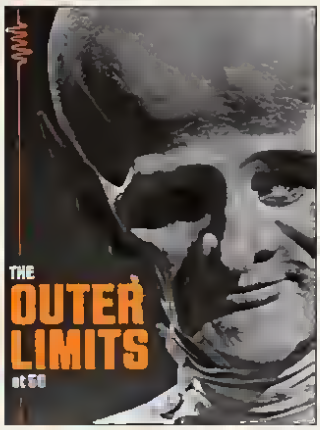
David J. Schow first sought to correct this imbalanced perception with his essential guidebook *The Outer Limits: The Official Companion* (written with Jeffrey Frentzen), which was first published in 1986 with a revised and expanded edition arriving twelve years later. It's a manifold text that functions not only as a detailed episode guide and critical examination of the series, but as a vital historical exploration of the show's creation through insightful interviews with many cast and crew members. Sadly, *The Official Companion* is now out of print and remains a much sought-after collector's item, but a digital edition and possible third printing may be on the horizon.

Schow, a celebrated author, editor, screenwriter and film historian returns to the show with the comparatively breezier but no less important *The*



The Outer Limits

Outer Limits at 50, to pay tribute to the series' golden anniversary. The first half of the book is essentially a condensed version of his original episode guide, presented in order of production (as opposed to broadcast) which allows for a valuable perspective and examination of the series' rapid creative evolution. For those already familiar with the show and *The Official Companion*'s dense packets of information, this decompressed overview serves as a welcome refresher course, while also functioning as a perfect primer for newcomers curious to learn what all the fuss is about.



The second portion details Schow's own journey from obsessive fan to amateur journalist to *The Outer Limits*' official chronicler, and now its principal standard-bearer and champion. It's a powerful, often melancholy personal essay in which he charts his transformation from an admirer of the show to becoming part of the fabric of its history – from youthful first encounters with its creators to final goodbyes with some of them as friends.

The book is further enhanced with a plethora of rare behind-the-scenes photos and illustrations by top artists, including Bernie Wrightson and Tim Bradstreet, as well as extensive gallery of *Outer Limits* collectibles throughout the decades, ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous, that further underline the show's lasting impact. This book is recommended not only to fans of *The Outer Limits* and fantastic television, but to anyone who has ever experienced the obsessive joy of fandom.

JOSEPH O'BRIEN

MR. MERCEDES

Stephen King
Scribner

It's refreshing that one of the world's most famous authors can try something different. This time around, King has opted to go the detective story route as opposed to his usual horror antics, although his knack for generating fear is alive and well. *Mr. Mercedes* opens with an unknown person driving a grey Mercedes Benz into a group of people, killing eight and injuring many others. A year later, the detective assigned to the Mercedes case, the now retired K. William Hodges, receives a letter from the killer, mocking the former cop's failure to catch him. Hodges bristles and resumes the chase to find the killer.

The first thing to notice about the novel is that the plot isn't all that original. It could have been plucked from many a police procedural show on TV. King's writing, however, more than makes up for his plot's shortcomings. He gives readers a window into the lives of both

THE GRIM READER



THE CUTTING ROOM: DARK REFLECTIONS OF THE SILVER SCREEN

Ellen Datlow (Ed.)
Tachyon Publications

Acclaimed editor Ellen Datlow's latest anthology assembles 23 film-inspired tales from both sides of the camera. The cinematic stories (almost all reprinted) gathered from well-known genre authors, including Gary McMahon, F. Paul Wilson and Gary A. Braunbeck, provide more novel interest than actual scares, but will definitely entertain film geeks and meta-media enthusiasts.

JESSA SOBCZUK



THE BOY WHO KILLED DEMONS

Dave Zeltserman
Overlook Press

The Boy Who Killed Demons is your typical coming-of-age story: awkward teen sex, bullies and... the occasional demon or two. In this latest novel by horror/mystery master Dave Zeltserman, fifteen year-old Henry Dudlow is fated with the ability to see demons and discovers there's one living next door to him. A fun and clever read, great for fans of dark humor.

VICTORIA BROWN



DIE AND STAY DEAD

Nicholaa Kaufmann
St. Martin's Griffin

Demons and revenants stalk the streets of New York City once again in Nicholas Kaufmann's sequel to *Dying Is My Business*. *Die and Stay Dead* builds on the mystery set up in the first installment – that of the history of the narrator, Trent, a demon-fighter who cannot die and has no memories of his past – and Kaufmann keeps the tension high in this energetic page turner.

CLAIRE HORSNELL



PROUD PARENTS

Kristopher Rufty
Samhain

After a medical experiment to help them conceive goes wrong, Greg and Sheila Heyman are on the run, trying to protect their mutant son from the men with guns. As the tot's hunger and condition grows out of control, they settle down in a quiet town, hoping to find a cure for whatever is making the boy a monster. While entertaining, *Proud Parents* is rife with horror clichés, and reads like a movie script that isn't going to be made anytime soon.

VICTORIA BROWN

WITH AN ENGLISH GHOST STORY, KIM NEWMAN TURNS A CLASSIC FORMULA ON ITS HAUNTED HEAD

Spiritual Crisis

& NEIL SNOWDON

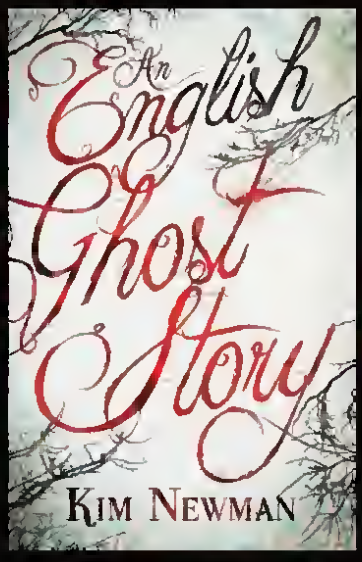
"IN BOOKS LIKE *THE AMITYVILLE HORROR* AND *THE SHINING*, FAMILIES ARE DRIVEN CRAZY by ghosts and end up at each other's throats; I wanted to do something slightly different," explains Kim Newman. "I wanted to do the idea that the family would drive the ghosts mad. That was something that I wanted to explore, how living people can affect magic, can turn good things bad..."

The English critic and author is probably best known to genre fans for his *Anno Dracula* series of novels and short stories (in which a victorious Dracula marries Queen Victoria), or his nonfiction tome *Nightmare Movies*, which maps the landscape of horror cinema from Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* to the present. His latest is *An English Ghost Story*, a novel he describes as being more contained in scope than his previous ones.

"For the last few years I've been focussed on the *Anno Dracula* books, lots of research, lots of characters, stories that span continents," he says, "so I wanted to do something smallish [with] a few characters that you get to know a bit better and a story much more limited in time and space. But then I decided to do a ghost story, and ghost stories by their very nature aren't limited in time and space. There's this huge pressure of the past that comes in."

While many of Newman's stories can be described as Tarantino-esque by their ability to be supremely effective and highly inventive examples of the genres they take place in while simultaneously commenting on them, *An English Ghost Story* is written in a different register. Quieter, less referential, it is also unsettling and uncomfortable in a way that is all too real. Newman is not playing with genre here, he's playing with emotion, and *An English Ghost Story* is an almost forensic exploration of a troubled family, something he says is inherently English.

"That's all our fiction," he says. "All our novels, all our TV shows, are families who don't get on. But not in the way that American dramas are, full of plates being thrown and that stuff. The English drama is more people staring at each other over the kitchen table, not saying anything. Little resentments, petty snobberies, class consciousness, money worries."

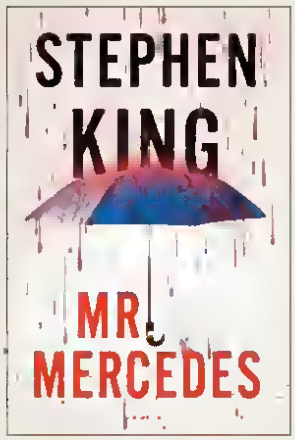


That quiet repression dovetails nicely with the supernatural given that ghost stories are often about the return of the repressed. It's also that quiet, naturalistic basis, which allows Newman to get, as he says, "crazier and crazier toward the end." As he shifts perspective from one family member to the other, we see how each one grinds upon the rest, how each one is simmering with anger and resentment. And, gradually, the author brings them to the boil – not by the clichés of relationship drama, adultery or violence. In Newman's hands, things are more delicate, more convincing, more insidious, more uncomfortable. More *real*.

In the novel, the Hollow is a dream house, the kind of place the Naremore family hope will heal their wounds and bring them closer together. But as autumn withers the leaves, what began as a dream becomes a nightmare. The house turns, and knowing them all so well, knows just how to hurt them all the most. As the stress and tensions build and the house feeds on the neuroses of the characters, the haunting takes on a kind of Lynchian quality of surreal terror, with the internal dramas manifesting themselves in the stone structure.

"The idea that magic or the supernatural is just doing what you want – it's just a mirror, it's just showing you, *you* – it's something that strikes me as sort of fundamental to the ghost story," says Newman. "*The Haunting of Hill House* has it, or *The Turn of the Screw*, the idea that what you take in to the haunted house is what's thrown back at you."

Like Tarantino, Newman is loved by genre fans who read him precisely because of his encyclopaedic knowledge of the genre he works in. But the author has been doing it longer, and he's got more to say. His work is like a Bradbury funhouse mirror; the glass is warped, the image distorted, but you can see yourself in it. It's just that the longer you look, the more likely you are to scream.



Hodges and his nemesis, amping up the suspense as they're drawn ever closer to one another. This is no ordinary game of cat and mouse, either, as the role of the cat is always shifting, even though the players in this game aren't aware of it.

As usual, King shines when it comes to his characters. Hodges' determination is palpable and his struggle to stay lawful in his hunt is fascinating. Additionally, Mr. Mercedes may be one of the most deplorable villains King has ever come up with, and that's saying a hell of a lot. He's a prejudiced, hate-filled and completely miserable man who is so nice on the surface that no one suspects a thing.

Ultimately, King's entry into the hard-boiled detective genre is a success and leaves the reader wanting more. Lucky for us, *Mr. Mercedes* is the first in a planned trilogy, the next of which is scheduled for release next year. If this book is any indication, the next two installments should be nothing short of stunning.

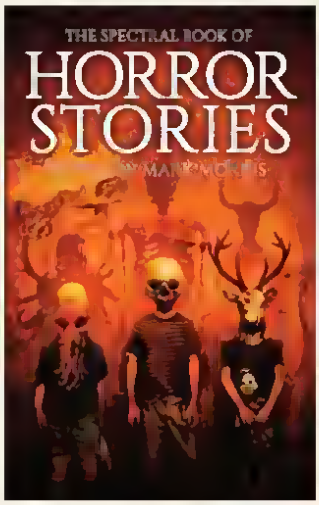
BRETT MCNEILL

THE SPECTRAL BOOK OF HORROR STORIES

Mark Morris, ed.
Spectral Press

In his introduction to *The Spectral Book of Horror Stories* – the debut to a series in the vein of famous British horror anthologies *The Fontana Book of Great Horror Stories* and *Pan Book of Horror Stories* – editor Mark Morris expresses his desire for this first volume "to become a watchword for genre excellence." It's a fine ambition, but sadly, the "very sharp teeth" we've been promised here are mostly dull.

For starters, many of the stories aren't even horror. Ramsey Campbell's "On the Tour," for example, is a middling tale of a pathetic ex-drummer with illusions of grandeur whose final breakdown is neither original, interesting nor horrific enough to merit its inclusion here. In other stories, the horror element is so understated that many readers will miss it entirely, as in the otherwise solid "Eastmouth" by Alison Moore, about an American girl visiting her fiancé's small English hometown where nothing ever changes. Furthermore, some tales are practically jokes, including Tom Fletcher's "Slape," "Stolen Kisses" by Michael Marshall Smith, "The Slista" by Stephen Laws and Alison Littlewood's "The Oog's Home." "The Life Inspector" by John Llewellyn Probert at least manages to achieve some wit and satire in its absurdity.



Thankfully, there are a few good tales here. "The Book and the Ring," by Reggie Oliver, is a creeper reminiscent of an M.R. James story about an Elizabethan composer who joins forces with a witch to find a valuable "Boke of the Oivill" (Book of the Oevil), and Brian Hodge's "Cures for a Sickened World" merges black metal and black humour in a tale of a singer's brutal vengeance against an internet critic who slammed him. The greatest discovery in the bunch, however, is Rio Youers' "Outside Heavenly," which offers enough dread to (almost) compensate for the rest of this light-on-frights collection. It's about a police investigation of an inexplicable crime that blends domestic abuse and Satanic powers in a weird rural geography. Think *True Detective*, only with full-blown terror.

The concluding novella by Stephen Volk – "Newspaper Heart," about a boy morbidly attached to his Guy Fawkes doll – had potential with its creepy concept but falls flat due to a plodding plot, mundane style and lack of a meaningful subtext to justify its length. All in all, this anthology needed stronger horror content and better writing if it wants to jumpstart a series. I wish it the best of luck, and hope for better examples of "genre excellence" in volume two... if it happens.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

LIBRARY OF THE DAMNED

WOMEN DESTROY HORROR!

Allow me to be frank: I hate that we need things such as Women in Horror Month. In a perfect world, all stories would get a fair shake based on merit alone, regardless of what lay between their creators' legs, but judging by the number of women whose names appear in anthology tables of contents and on lists of best horror compared to men, it ain't a perfect world – yet.

The *Women Destroy Horror!* issue of *Nightmare Magazine* (*RM#133*) seeks to correct that with a one-two punch of new and reprinted fiction, essays, and author interviews. Riffing on the plaintive "women destroy horror!" cries of the misogynists, the *Women Destroy...* project is the result of a successful Kickstarter (along with spiritual siblings *Women Destroy Science Fiction!* and *Women Destroy Fantasy!*), and proves exactly why this phrase is so odious.



While admittedly I may not have made the same editorial choices as the issue's fiction editor, Ellen Datlow; she skews towards dense, mythology-rooted narratives, the eight short stories do a fine job of illustrating the diversity of the female voice, from the literate, poetic terrors of Gemma Files (who serves up a tale of a cult literally hunting men for sport under the guise of religion), to much more visceral entries by Joyce Carol Oates ("Martyrdom") and A.R. Morlan ("...Warmer"), who both deliver scathing yarns about women's perceived place in society. In particular, the latter two tales illustrate that female writers can conjure brutal, haunting imagery just as well as their male counterparts.

For me, however, the most compelling part of the double issue was the non-fiction. Though not necessary presenting new information, the articles served as an excellent reminder of the wealth of women whose work helped shape the genre in the 1800 and 1900s, from Ann Radcliffe to Mary Shelley to Daphne du Maurier. Likewise, the interviews offer candid discussions of what it is like to create horror as a woman. The fiction contributors weigh in, as does *American Horror Story* screenwriter Jessica Sharzer in a Q&A, and author Chesya Burke (*Let's Play White*) with an essay on horror's misogyny problem. It all adds up to a lucid untangling of the expectations, misconceptions and struggles of contemporary female blood-slingers.

Of course, *Women Destroy Horror!* isn't going change the genre landscape or crush misogynists where they stand – it'll take more than one magazine to break up the ol' boys' club – but the next time you hear some rube caterwauling about how women can't tell scary stories, at least you'll have something you can slide into their hands to prove them wrong.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



THE FRIGHT GALLERY

CURATED BY **GARY PULLIN**

THIS MONTH: BOOKS OF BARKER'S DARK ART

How does one contain an imagination as vast and enigmatic as that of Clive Barker? Century Guild was up to the task and, after a successful Kickstarter campaign, the publisher has unleashed the first in a series of comprehensive volumes of dark art from the hand of one of horror's true geniuses.

Titled *Clive Barker. IMAGINER Paintings and Drawings Volume 1*, it features a gold debossed cover with over 200 pages of all new images and ultra-high resolution scans of never-before-seen drawings and paintings. The book will be released in two different formats, an elegant hardbound limited edition of 1000 copies and a signed bookplate edition with a clamshell-boxed faux leather cover, limited to 100.

Barker's art agent and owner of Century Guild, Thomas Negovan, elaborates on the compendium: "The map of his territory is *so* enormous, so the most challenging part was the months of meditation and research and listening to decades of interviews ... I'm sure the artworks of Clive Barker are going to inspire an incredible amount of ideas in the people who meditate on the visions."

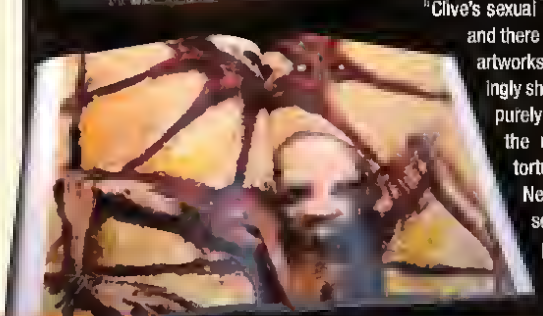
Volume 2 met its goal on Kickstarter at the beginning of this month, but there are plans for eight books in the series.

"There are three distinct periods in Clive's artwork," explains Negovan. "The *Imaginer* books will cover the middle period, which is the most accessible and visually recognizable as his work – this is the *Abarat* era, the stretch when his skill level was high enough to be able to practically mainline a current directly from his spirit to the canvas. The earlier work was more graphic and rooted in interpreting other people's ideas, this middle work is 100 percent Clive Barker. And there's [also] a distinct shift in his artwork following his coma three years ago that's led to what is absolutely his most powerful work."



Barker is known for his visceral and at times controversial imagination, so one wonders what constitutes his most extreme imagery in the series. Negovan notes that "Death's Womb" (bottom left), which features a skeletal figure bound in the fetal position, is particularly disturbing to him, but there are many others that most people will find much more unsettling.

"Clive's sexual intensity is no secret, and there are a great number of artworks that would be terrifyingly shocking to most people purely in their exploration of the most creative erotic tortures possible," says Negovan. "We're still sorting out how to do a proper volume of those!"





The Resurrection of Christopher Carrion

With the first volume showing Barker as, what Negovan calls, "a shamanistic artist," there's plenty of art to dig through to fill the subsequent volumes. He notes that much work remains to uncover it all.

"[W]e have some artifacts we've unearthed while digging in Clive's home that have never seen print, as well as paintings that have been hidden for years; there's one we just uncovered the other day that's about a decade old that might be the best painting yet..."

To buy the books, visit centuryguild.net, and to stay updated on the Kickstarter campaigns, search for "Clive Barker" on kickstarter.com





THE GORE MET

MENU: CANNIBALS AND BEATLES



Way back in *RM#14*, I waxed enthusiastically about Matt Jaissle's delightfully depraved *The Necro Files* (1997), a tongue-in-cheek underground classic about a cannibalistic serial rapist and murderer who is shot dead (while eating a nipple!) by a pair of inept homicide detectives only to be resurrected by a satanic coven. The zombie promptly kills the cultists and wanders the streets, giant boner in the breeze, randomly raping women while the cops who killed him follow the trail of eviscerated hotties.

I revisited *The Necro Files* – it still ranks as one of my all-time favourite underground flicks for gore and guffaws – after Jaissle popped up in a Facebook group for underground horror fans, advertising copies of it and his later films for sale through his Storenvy shop, VidEvil Video.

"*The Necro Files* actually began as kind of an experiment," recalls Jaissle. "This was back in the mid '90s. I noticed a lot of underground filmmakers were starting to have success shooting on video, largely due to the new film-look processes that were becoming available at the time. I wrote a script with my main investor, Todd Tjersland, designed to be sort of a parody of underground movies. We wanted to go as far over the top with sex and gore as possible".



Tjersland and Jaissle made four ambitious and well-crafted films together before going their separate ways. Jaissle returned to the underground in 2D1D with *300 Killers* and his latest, the Beatles-inspired *Revolution 666*, which is out this month from Whacked Movies.

"A guy named Matt Hundley, who did FX on my first two movies, told me once about a nightmare he had that was full of Beatles references," says Jaissle. "I thought, 'Great idea for a horror movie!' I'd have to be careful, of course, and not mention the band by name. But a lot of their freakier mythos involves outside elements, like Charles Manson for example. Ultimately, it seemed apparent to me that the Helter Skelter of today would certainly be the zombie apocalypse. But with a walrus."

And there is a walrus! A masked serial killer mails local DJ "Freaky" Freddie Curtains (Adolt Mulzer) a CD containing a mysterious song called "Revolution 666" and promptly commits suicide. Not knowing what it is, Curtains plays the song on air. A fashion photographer happens to be listening while doing a shoot in a cemetery. The dead serial killer promptly crawls out of his grave and guts and eats the model before shambling off to break into a Hard Rock Café and steal a certain walrus costume (goo goo g'joob!). Meanwhile, three hilariously cliché hippies are on the hunt for the CD in order to bring about Manson's vision of the apocalypse, amid a slew of clever references to The Beatles.

"The movie's full of them!" chuckles Jaissle. "They're referred to as 'The Fab Four' when the DJ searches the song. It was written with Charles Manson to bring Paul back from the dead, a perfect tool to start the zombie 'Helter Skelter'! It's a pop culture parody. Younger people may not get the references. Oh well".

The walrus-costumed zombie is indiscriminate in who he slaughters and dines upon, and the gore effects – which include a drill to the eye and a chainsaw in the face – are all practical effects. But Jaissle is not averse to digital effects.

"Depends on the situation, I think," he allows. "We did a little bit of CG gore in *300 Killers*, but that was mostly to augment a practical effect. I guess I am old school. I'd rather film something than have somebody add it in later. I don't disagree with using CGI to enhance practical effects; it's when filmmakers try to replace practical effects with CGI that I think they go wrong. It's lazy."

Jaissle is a filmmaker whose career stretches back to the VHS era of the mid-'90s, but the market for the kind of films he makes is markedly different now. Where many underground filmmakers are self-releasing and relying on video-on-demand to get their work out, this director is sticking to the traditional route.

"I actually sent it to Wild Eye first, and they passed it along to Whacked Movies," he says. "I figure I'm lucky to get any release considering how oversaturated the market is. Whacked Movies stands a pretty good chance of getting their titles into stores. Ultimately, that's what I'd like."

Will he make the ultimate leap from VHS to hi-def?

"Yeah, *Revolution 666* was shot in HD. The last picture, *300 Killers*, was released on Blu-ray in Germany. So, we'll just have to see what happens."



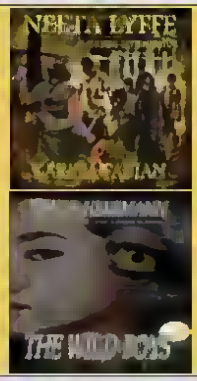
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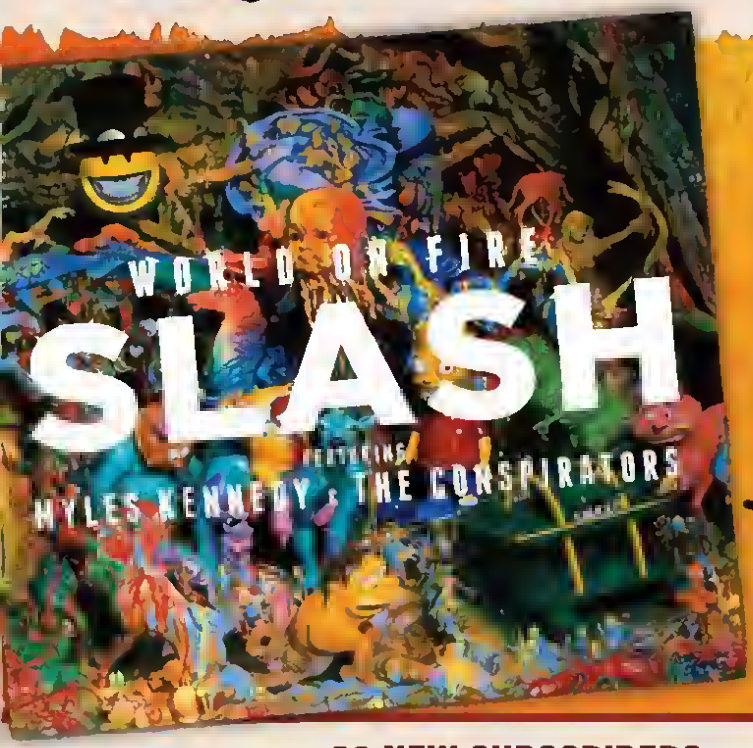
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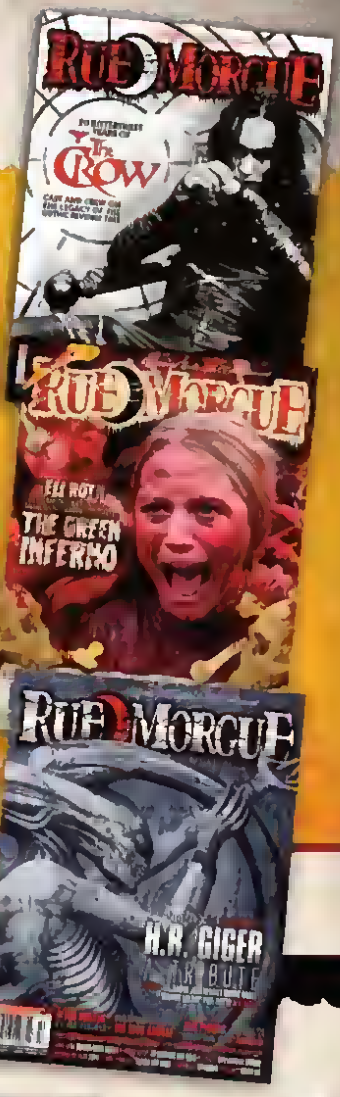
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REVIEWS BY MARK R. HASAN, AARON VON LUPTON, JON STEFFENS AND GLENN TILSON



THE DOLL

SOUNDTRACK

Dante Tomaselli

ELITE/MVD AUDIO

Writer-director Dante Tomaselli takes a unique approach by releasing a soundtrack to *The Doll*, a film that is still in development. This first sonic draft offers an impressionistic narrative with free-flowing drones, processed and reprocessed effects, mangled remnants of dialogue, and looped music fragments which collectively seem to drag the listener into a murky chamber for 65 minutes. Unlike his prior CD, *Scream in the Dark*, *The Doll* isn't a concept album but an organic creature that breathes, and the density of material should provoke some intriguing responses, especially in the dark. It doesn't matter what *The Doll* is ultimately about, but how the transformative sonics never rest, shifting and occasionally colliding and morphing into rather hypnotic sound sculptures. The lurid quality of this journey is a testament to Tomaselli's fastidiousness in marrying the common with the surreal. **MRH**



VIDEOGRAM

SOUNDTRACK

Videogram

(INDEPENDENT)

Evoking aspects of Goblin and John Carpenter, Videogram's self-titled debut is another skillfully crafted faux soundtrack album grounded in retro electronica, but with a specific affection for those direct-to-video action/thriller cheapies. "Walpurgisnacht" features organ, prog-rock percussion, and a repeated fuzzy synth motif to map out the straightforward main theme, whereas the shadow of Carpenter is very present in the frenetic bass line that propels "I Warned You Not to Go Out Tonight," as well as the slow ascending chords of "Kathy's Dream" (with revolving Morriconesque synth chimes). Between the moodier tracks are some rock-styled and dippy dance cues typical of the odd source cue found on a soundtrack LP, and the peppy album's bookended with faux anti-copyright narration and intro/outro music for their Vestron Video styled logo. **MRH**



BUDDY BLACK

ROCK

The Story on the Road to Waterloo

(INDEPENDENT)

Subtitled *A Vampire Love Story in Three Acts*, Toronto rock/folk/punk act Buddy Black might be overreaching a tad on this six-song EP, but the concept is strong enough that it mostly works regardless. A dapper gent in black suit and tie, Buddy Black plays a primarily upbeat style of folk-punk that sounds like Mumford & Sons on an unlimited supply of Jameson, though his vocals have a trail Frank Black-like quality that gives the sound an oh-so slightly darker shade. The vampire love story in question centres around two down and out bloodsuckers trying to kick the blood habit and regain their humanity, an appropriately gritty tale for an album full of dirty blues, country twang and Irish drinking tunes. Indeed, *Waterloo* boasts an undeniably down 'n' dirty, undead western charm. Though it's no substitute for Tangerine Dream, Buddy Black makes the kind of music Jesse Hooker and his *Near Dark* outlaws could sink their fangs into after an all-night hemoglobin bender. **AVL** 3½



LUCIFER FULCI

ROCK

Season of the Witch EP

(INDEPENDENT)

Lucifer Fulci loves him some horror, having written a series of independent fiction and musical projects including the *Season of the Witch* EP, in which he expresses a love for our favourite night of the year. In fact, of the six songs on this EP, three mention Halloween. While that enthusiasm is great, it also seems to have led him to rush in without due consideration – even the track listing is wrong! *Season of the Witch* starts promisingly with some ominous, undistorted guitar work on "Halloween Daemonique Infinitum," but the percussion is a rudimentary plodding affair, reflecting an uncreatively programmed drum machine. Vocals are spoken, heavily processed and bland. Dare we give Lucifer advice? Focus on that sinister guitar, find a drummer, and either get a vocalist or opt for a new style, be it singing or something more extreme. **GT**



UNFINISHED BUSINESS

PUNK

Mix and Mash

HERETICAL OBJECTS COOPERATIVE

Rarely does one become a horror fan in middle age. Forry dubbed us "monster kids" because – blame fairy tales or trick or treating – we develop our macabre tastes so early. Enter Unfinished Business, a Toronto trio getting as much press for their ages (thirteen to fifteen) as for their music. While not exactly horror punk, four of the ten songs on this cassette's A-side (side B being primarily remixes) deal with monsters, hauntings, and Halloween, while a cover of Misfits' "Where Eagles Dare" cements their position within *Rue Morgue* territory. Lyrically, "If we don't run right now/we're all gonna be toast" may be juvenile, but it's made up for by the tunes' pure, unpolished punk rock fun, infectious enough to avoid the novelty tag. Hey, how many albums did you release at age fifteen? Bonus points for the cover art in all its ghoulish garish glory. **GT** 3½

HOUSE OF USHER

SOUNDTRACK

Les Baxter

INTRADA



Released for the first time ever in 2011, Intrada has reissued the highly sought after Les Baxter score to *House of Usher*, the first of American International Pictures' series of Edgar Allan Poe adaptations starring Vincent Price. Taken from masters used in the final production of the film, Intrada's CD includes *House of Usher*'s complete score, covering three quarters of the movie, including an opening overture that was scrubbed from later film screenings and home video, making this a key release for collectors. Baxter uses several orchestral elements to create a comforting, at times romantic, atmosphere that unsurprisingly also carries an underlying sense of unease. For maximum creep and kitsch, tracks such "House of Evil" and "Fall of the House of Usher" contain choral elements that give the movie its ghostly vibe. Rounded out with sumptuous artwork by veteran soundtrack designer Joe Sikoryak, *House of Usher* is a must have for devotees of horror's bygone era of 1960s atmosphere and aesthetic. **AVL**



NECROPHAGIA

METAL

WhiteWorm Cathedral

SEASON OF MIST

For those unfamiliar with Necrophagia, the title of their 2000 demo compilation *A Legacy of Horror, Gore and Sickness* is a good summation of their three decades in death metal. That legacy is reinforced by *WhiteWorm Cathedral*, their strongest release since 1998's *Haulocausto De La Morte*. Playing "guess the reference" reveals Lovecraftian allusions on "Elder Things," *Zombie* worship on "The Dead Among Us," and a Peter Cushing *Shockwaves* sample commanding one to join the irresistibly catchy "March of the Deathcorps(e)." Tempos favour the undead shamble of Obituary or Bolt Thrower over the usual breakneck pace of extreme metal, mournful melodies wafting mist-like above the riffing, only to be dragged back down into the filth by Killjoy's vomitous exhortations – while Mirai (of Japanese genre-benders Sigh) creeps us out with classically eerie '80s synth. Reliable as Halloween, Necrophagia continues spreading that horror, gore and sickness. *Viva la muerte!* GT ☠☠☠☠



NUNSLAUGHTER

METAL

Angelic Dread

HELL'S HEADBANGERS RECORDS

After years of inhabiting the same filthy auditory plateau of grinding, lo-fi sonic bludgeon as Profanatica and Repulsion, the ever-prolific Nunslaughter (boasting over 100 releases since their late-'80s inception!) have opted for a slightly cleaner thrash metal approach this time around. That's not to say we're talking *Master of Puppets* – this is still nasty stuff – just that Nunslaughter gave its gore-caked sacrificial blades a sharpening and a polish before plunging them into the listener's ear. There's still no mistaking bandleader Don of the Dead's profane intent, as such blissful hymns as "Three Nails, One Liar" and "Sickened by the Sight of Christ" can attest. It's all enjoyable in a blasphemous black/thrash way, but the aforementioned productivity becomes an issue. With 31 songs, many below the two minute mark, it all starts to blur together well before "Cerebus" brings things to a close. Can there be too much of an evil thing? GT ☠☠1/2



BONEYARD

METAL

Fear of a Zombie Planet

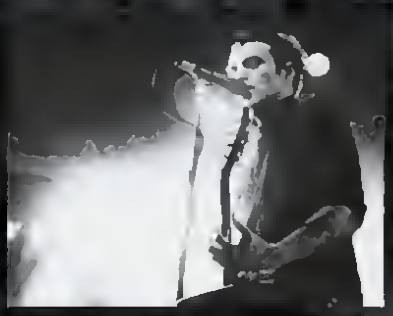
HORROR PAIN GORE DEATH PRODUCTIONS

With an album cover sporting the gnarly poster art from Umberto Lenzi's zombie disaster *Nightmare City*, and sounding like Repulsion and Ghoul combined their DNA into one mutated *It's Alive* baby, Boneyard is rotten meat and rancid potatoes horror-obsessed deathrash metal. These heshers aren't reinventing the wheel, but the fifteen-year-old in me is saying "Fuck that shit, this kills!" The first two tracks speed along well enough, but when "Carnival Of Terror" kicks in, the record really rises from the grave. "Let the Good Times Rot" channels the buzzsaw groove of early Entombed and the slam of Headrot, while "Grind, Death Metal and Beers" has a weird opening sound and hectic urgency that would feel right at home on the soundtrack to *Hobo With a Shotgun*. All in all, this release by these beer-soaked, gore metal maniacs will have you welcoming, not cowering in *Fear of a Zombie Planet*. JS ☠☠☠☠



LISTEN to MY NIGHTMARE

After the demise of the Michale Graves-era Misfits in 2000, the underground responded with a new genre called horror punk, an aggressive, genre movie-obsessed style which has also retroactively been applied to the 'fits. Since its official inception nearly fifteen years ago, arguably no one has afforded it more style, creativity and insanity than Vancouver's Chris Kirkham, a.k.a. Nim Vind. After a couple of gothy, Misfits-y releases in his band Mr. Underhill, Vind joined the more successful dark pop act The Vincent Black Shadow on bass, before starting a career under his pseudonym. Last month Vind released his third solo album, *Saturday Night Séance*, on his own House of Vind label. It's the latest in the evolution of what the singer/songwriter views as the Nim Vind character.



"I see my music as character-driven," he explains over the phone from Vancouver. "People love horror movies because they love Freddy, Jason, Dracula, etc. Those characters are identifiable because they are flawed and complex – much more so than superhero characters who are unrealistically good. People want to dress up and be monsters, so that's sort of how they can identify with Nim Vind."

Did I mention Vind sees himself as kind of crazy? A therapy session veteran, the name Nim Vind is derived from the National Institute of Mental Health (N.I.M.H.), while the "Vind" is short for vindication. Together it means "Freedom by Insanity." Vind's state of mind is partly captured in the song "Astronomicon," released as a single in 2010 with a new version appearing on *Saturday Night Séance* that includes guitar by rock legend Todd Rundgren.



"It's inspired by the *Necronomicon*, which pulls people into another world in *Evil Dead*," he says. "There are times in your life, whether you're on drugs, suffering from anxiety or falling in love where you feel like you are now living in another world. You become a different person. You can exist in another reality while still on earth."

What makes *Saturday Night Séance* such a trip isn't just Vind's songwriting chops – cool melodies, fun punk rock hooks and gothic charm – it's the fact that he manages to stray from any formula while maintaining a consistency that makes his music unmistakably his own. Every song is a different manifestation of the character.

"I tried to write ten completely different songs on this album," he reveals. "'Where I'm From' is my Bruce Springsteen number. 'ESP' is heavy and dark, and sounds like Life of Agony meets Bauhaus. 'That Girl' sounds like warped Beach Boys. I don't ever want to be stuck in any one thing. Whatever you get from me, though, it's going to be Nim Vind. I think people are ready for something different. People are sick of eating cheerios, they're ready for Count Chocula!"

AARON VON LUPTON

KING DIAMOND IS BACK FROM THE BRINK OF DEATH WITH A SERIES OF VINYL REISSUES AND HIS FIRST NORTH AMERICAN TOUR IN NEARLY A DECADE. GIVE HIM YOUR SOUL... PLEASE

Good to be King

BY CHAD HENSLEY



KING DIAMOND, HORROR METAL'S REIGNING MONARCH, RETURNS TO NORTH AMERICA THIS FALL FOR THE FIRST TIME IN NEARLY A DECADE. Now fully recovered from the triple-bypass surgery he underwent in 2010, the Danish metal deity will take the stage with his trademark top hat, corpse paint and microphone stand made from human bones for seventeen dates into November. The show promises to be the singer's largest production ever and features one of his most ambitious stage designs.

There is much to be happy about, not least the news that Diamond can sing again. The grueling recovery period, necessitated him having to relearn everything he knew about using his voice.

> "I had to learn to breathe again," he reveals, "breathing had to be completely different. It was difficult to do because I had so many new factors in performing that I had to concentrate on trying to pull off for the first time. It was a different experience than I ever had before."

Following an appearance at Metallica's 30th anniversary gig in 2011, Diamond convinced himself that his voice was still there, but he was still far from where he needed to be, even after wholesale changes in diet, cutting smoking and a strict regimen of power walks.

"I could not enjoy it as much as the good old days because I really had a lot on my mind," he says. "Four or five months after the operation, I had been on the stage with War Beast here in Dallas during a sound check. I had a metal rod in my chest that held the rib cage together after the operation so the bones could grow back together. At that point, the inside of my chest started rattling. It felt like I was about to die and I had to get the hell out of that place. It was a nasty experience."

Those days, thankfully, are behind him, as his enthusiasm for the tour demonstrates. Props, costumed actors and other theatrics will unfold beneath a giant Baphomet symbol on a two-tiered stage – all of which has been designed to have a throwback feel.

"We've brought back some old effects," says Diamond, "like the cremation scene from the Conspiracy tour in 1989 where Dr. Landau and the priest Sammael are on stage participating in a cremation with a coffin that is like a magician's trick. You won't believe your eyes!"

Fans can expect to hear songs from almost every King Diamond album, including *Fatal Portrait*, *Abigail*, *Them*, *Conspiracy*, *The Eye*, and *Give Me Your Soul... Please*.

"If you never saw or heard King Diamond, this is absolutely the best time," he promises. "We sound much better, tighter. It is a 90 minute show. We play a couple of Mercyful Fate [Diamond's former band] songs, 'Evil' and 'Come to the Sabbath,' but it is a King Diamond show for sure."

The tour is tied in to a series of limited edition coloured vinyl reissues that Metal Blade Records has been releasing throughout the year. Since May, the company has put out 1500-copy runs of Mercyful Fate's *Melissa*, *Don't Break the Oath*, *Return of the Vampire* and *The Beginning*, as well as King Diamond's *Abigail*, *Them*, *The Eye* and *Fatal Portrait*.

King Diamond's songs have, of course, always maintained a strong connection to horror, with their recurring themes of ghosts, witches and raising the dead. While he's been a horror movie fan since childhood, he also points to real life supernatural encounters and occult occurrences that he has experienced – some of them on stage.

"We saw a photo of our actress during the song Shapes of Black at this Swedish Rock Festival, and for some reason all you see is her legs up to her thigh, after that it cuts off. Someone from a rock magazine got us a good bootleg of the show, and when we started watching it – right in the spot where our actress was standing – something walks in front of the camera. It was almost like being part of *The Omen* movie. ... I saw another photo from Bloodstock festival with a shape on stage which looked like this bald person standing in silhouette looking at me. That was during the song 'Come to the Sabbath.' There are definitely things around."

PLAY DEAD



NOW PLAYING > OCULUS RIFT



OCULUS RIFT

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Oculus

Virtual reality is upon us at last, and the good news is you don't have to install a jack into the back of your neck or plug into an *eXistenZ*–style alien pod. Oculus Rift, a 3D headset, might be the next big thing in horror gaming if the developers can get the virtual reality element right.

Also referred to as simply "the Rift," it has noise-cancelling headphones built into a pair of futuristic-looking goggles designed to block out any outside light. You hook the device up to your compatible gaming platform and the motion-tracking technology allows your character to move his, her or its head as you do in real time. You can look around a room, lean in to examine something more closely, or peep around corners in case something terrifying lurks around the bend. You could be searching a dimly-lit room for a monster and turn around to find yourself eye-to-eye with it.

The device has already made a splash in the industry despite the fact that it isn't even on the market yet. Created by Oculus founder Palmer Luckey, the Rift came to development after a 30 day Kickstarter campaign that met its financial goal within four hours of going live. The developer kits (which are currently compatible with Windows, Mac, OS or Linux only) were given as gifts to Kickstarter backers who pledged $300 or more.

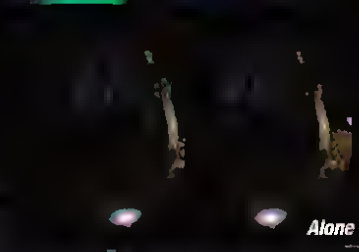
Obviously, the gaming community was paying attention, but the biggest bump for the Rift came at E3 last year, with a demo of *Alien: Isolation*, now out from Sega. The success – and, more importantly, the appeal to horror gamers – lies in the fact that the Rift's immersive VR environment envelops you in claustrophobia and dread; for example, you can look down at your own chest to see that you've been impaled by a xenomorph's tail! But while *Isolation* is poised to be a huge horror title for the Rift, indie game developers pursuing the technology have been less successful. Washington-based Greenwood Games, for example, mounted an unsuccessful crowdfunding campaign for a title called *Alone* (about supernatural hunters in the 1800's), which draws from the first-person found-footage concept, and could have taken full advantage of the Oculus' POV abilities.

"We've used quite a few things as inspiration for *Alone*," explains developer Oan Wallace. "Films like *Paranormal Activity* and *The Blair Witch Project* have been big ones. We're really trying to break the mould of jump scares. Our approach is much more subtle: a lingering fear of the unknown, the feeling of someone watching you."

You're probably wondering what makes the Rift any different from the previous waves of gadgets that promised the ultimate in VR. Well, for one, Oculus has paired up with Samsung, so it's safe to say the technology is sound. It also doesn't hurt that it's being developed directly for consumers for gaming purposes, so it'll be affordable (early estimates are between $200 and $400). Finally, the Rift boasts two new features unseen in previous VR technology: positional head-tracking and low persistence, which significantly reduce the motion blur that made testers of yesteryear's devices want to barf.



Alien: Isolation



Alone



Caffeine

Another indie game horror game called *Caffeine* has also been trying to take advantage of these breakthroughs. Developed by Dylan Browne, it's set in a near future where caffeine has become rare and impossible to grow on Earth, forcing humanity to take to the stars to scavenge the drug from planets and asteroid fields. Players awaken alone aboard a mining ship. As they travel its corridors, they encounter strange surprises made terrifying by the Rift's head tracking system.

"I enjoy giving the player time to explore the areas, and even then there are very subtle scares that you might not notice, but when you do, it seems a heap scarier than the big jump scares," says Browne. "There are long areas [in *Caffeine*] where there are not many horror elements, which adds to the isolation – at the same time giving room for narrative – but also making the player let his guard down, which I think adds to the experience."

Caffeine was greenlit by the Steam community last September, and is set for a mid-2015 release. Seeing as some of the most terrifying horror games have come out of independent studios, including last year's *Outlast* and *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*, titles like these could be the future of horror gaming.

"The best is yet to come," predicts Wallace. "After using a Rift, you're not going to want to go back to conventional gaming."

BRITTANY VINCENT

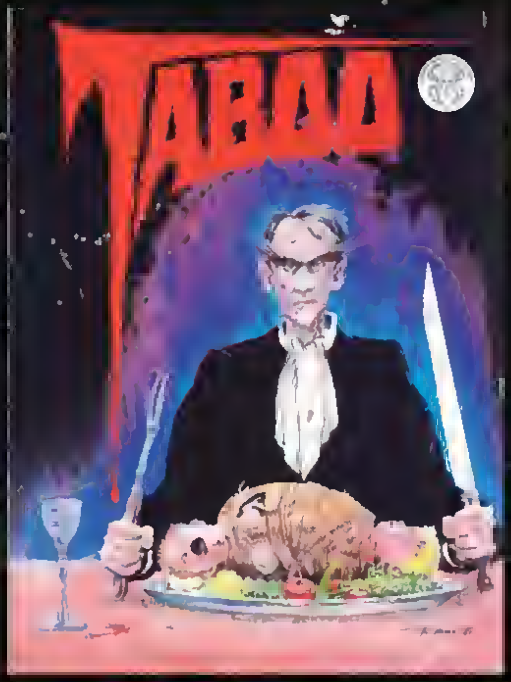
CLASSIC CUT

TABOO

TUNDRA / KITCHEN SINK PRESS ☠ 1988–1995

In the mid-1980s, artist Stephen Bissette was helping to revitalize horror comics. His collaboration with writer Alan Moore and co-artist John Totleben on DC's *Swamp Thing* pushed the boundaries of corporate horror comics, but the '80s horror boom that energized the genre in virtually every medium – books, TV, movies – was passing over comics. The Comics Code, established in 1954 with a mandate to strangle horror comics (particularly the EC titles then dominating sales), had largely succeeded. The few that survived read like neutered EC tales, safe stories that could as easily have been published in 1955 as 1985.

The Code made comics safe for kids, but Bissette and Totleben sought something darker, more serious, and resolutely adult that could share in the era's horror bounty. They wanted to drag horror comics out of the 1950s and open them to sophisticated terrors, so they founded an anthology called *Taboo*. Work began on *Taboo* in 1985, but business difficulties (including the departure of Totleben and its original publisher) delayed its debut until 1988. When it arrived, however, it was a revelation. Gone were EC trappings like black humor, twist endings, and toothless horror hosts such as the Crypt Keeper. These stories were mature, serious... and explicit.







Clive Barker, the hottest name in horror at the time and one of its most transgressive voices, introduced the first issue. Stories included an Alan Moore piece about a deadly game show, a Charles Burns teen plague tale prefiguring *Black Hole*, an Eddie Campbell true crime puzzler, and the first chapter of Tim Lucas' erotic horror story *Throat Sprockets* (later completed as a novel). Bissette contributed an essay and "Cottonmouth," about undead women taking revenge on businessmen responsible for toxic shock deaths by stuffing their mouths with tampons, sewing them shut, and leaving them to choke to death.

Later issues pushed boundaries even further. Neil Gaiman and Michael Zulli tackled baby-eating, while underground comix legend S. Clay Wilson depicted Bosch-like visions of perversion. Grindhouse-style sex and gore ran alongside Charles Vess' elegant fairy tales, while Moebius and Alejandro Jodorowsky struck out in uncharted directions. Bissette's perceptive introductions accompanied each story.

Despite its impressive roster, *Taboo* wasn't a commercial success. It appeared erratically – seven issues and a special from 1988 to 1992 – and was weighed down by censorship issues and conflict with its co-production company Tundra (which joined at issue 5). Bissette ceased operations after issue 7, but *Taboo* re-appeared three years later, published by Kitchen Sink Press. That incarnation – which collected stories that had been created for earlier issues but hadn't been published – ended with 1995's issue 9.

Despite winning the industry's highest honor – the Eisner Award – for Best Anthology in 1993, *Taboo* is not widely known today. Because its material largely hasn't been reprinted and many of its key creators are no longer active in mainstream comics, it isn't afforded the importance it deserves. Few modern readers know that *Taboo* serialized the early chapters of Alan Moore's key post-*Watchmen* works, *Lost Girls* and *From Hell*. Fewer still recognize that by ditching humour, horror hosts and twist endings, the series broke the stranglehold of the EC model and modernized horror comics. Without *Taboo*, we wouldn't have *The Walking Dead*, for example.

Most importantly, *Taboo* was a key title in bridging two comics industries. It arose out of the insular, super-hero dominated industry of the '70s and '80s, and moved towards the eclectic, mature medium that today simultaneously drives Hollywood, supports critical darlings like Chris Ware and Dan Clowes, and hosts legions of mini-comics and webcomics in virtually every genre. The series may not have been long-lived, but the influence of *Taboo* is vast and – like all great and evil things in horror – undying.

SAM COSTELLO

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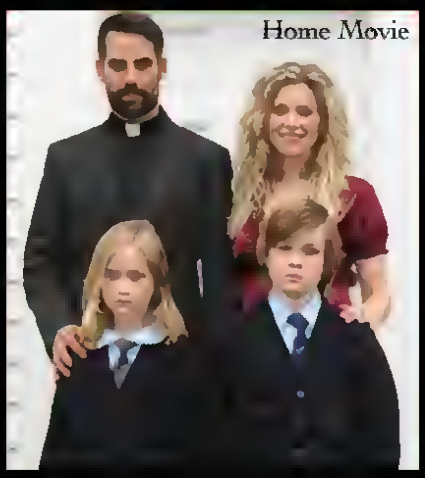


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